TENNESSEE COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

TENNESSEE PROMISE EVALUATION

JANUARY 2024

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ERIN BROWN
Research Analyst

ROBERT QUITTMEYER
Research Analyst

★

JASON E. MUMPOWER
Comptroller of the Treasury

Table of contents

Introduction

In 2014, the General Assembly adopted the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act to provide recent high school graduates the opportunity to earn an associate degree, certificate, or diploma free of tuition and mandatory fees. The primary eligibility requirement is Tennessee residency, which differentiates Tennessee Promise from other forms of state aid that include demonstrated financial need and/or academic merit criteria. To date, nine cohorts (starting with the high school graduating class of 2015) have enrolled in a postsecondary institution using the Promise scholarship. Partnering organizations pair each Promise applicant with a paid or volunteer mentor who is to assist students with the college application and financial aid process. Promise students must enroll in an eligible credential program the fall semester immediately following high school graduation and maintain continuous full-time enrollment. Students may receive the scholarship for up to five semesters or eight trimesters, or until they earn a diploma, certificate, or associate degree, whichever comes first.[A]

> Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that can be used at any Tennessee community college or college of applied technology. Promise students must enroll immediately following high school graduation.

Public Chapter 900 (2014) requires the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) to review and study the Tennessee Promise scholarship program and determine the effectiveness of the program. OREA published its first review of Tennessee Promise in 2020, which included analysis of Promise cohorts 1 through 3, with complete data available only for the first cohort. This new report includes an analysis of Promise student cohorts 1 through 5 and a partial analysis of cohorts 6 and 7.

The Drive to 55

Tennessee Promise was created as a part of the statewide Drive to 55 initiative. Introduced in 2013 by then-Governor Bill Haslam, the Drive to 55 is a strategic initiative to equip 55 percent of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential by 2025.

The Drive to 55 includes a suite of programs and initiatives focused on workforce readiness. Key areas of attention include college readiness, access, and completion; helping adults who have earned college credit complete a credential; and aligning education with workforce needs.

> "This isn't just about higher education – it's about better jobs for more Tennesseans. It's about building a stronger economy. We don't have a choice if we want to be the number one state in the Southeast for high quality jobs."
>
> Governor Bill Haslam, 2014 State of the State Address

In his 2014 State of the State address, Governor Haslam introduced the Tennessee Promise scholarship as a part of the Drive to 55 initiative. He stated that 55 percent of the state's population would need a postsecondary credential in 2025 to get a job. At that time, 32 percent of Tennessee adults had earned a credential beyond a high school diploma.

[A] Students may remain eligible for Promise following completion of a certificate or diploma if they remain enrolled in a sequential diploma, certificate, or associate degree program.

Exhibit A: The Drive to 55 has five key focus areas
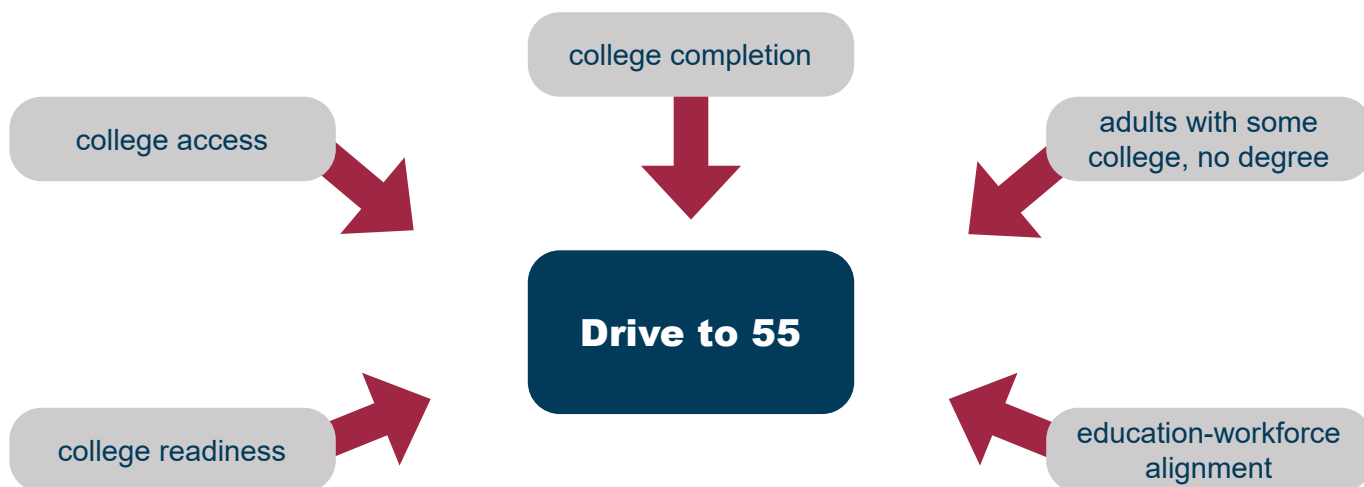
Tennessee Promise: Access and completion

Tennessee Promise was established as part of the Drive to 55 to support two of the five focus areas: college access and college completion, specifically for recent high school graduates.

Promise and college access

Tennessee Promise aims to improve college access among recent high school graduates in Tennessee. Tennessee Promise simplifies college access by removing the largest barrier to higher education: cost. The scholarship covers tuition and mandatory fees for on-campus courses at eligible institutions regardless of students' academic merit or financial need. The state residency requirement allows almost all high school seniors to apply for Tennessee Promise. Other scholarships (such as need- or merit-based scholarships) draw from a smaller applicant pool.

Additionally, all Promise applicants are paired with a mentor whose purpose is to assist students with the college application and financial aid process during their senior year of high school and the summer between graduation and enrollment in college.

> Tennessee Promise supports college access through broad eligibility and mentor services.
>
> Promise supports college completion through full-time, continuous enrollment requirements.

Promise and college completion

Tennessee Promise is structured to encourage timely completion of a postsecondary credential. Promise students are required to enroll in an eligible program the fall semester immediately following high school graduation and remain enrolled full time.[B] This requirement is meant to help students maintain momentum and keep them on track to earn a credential within the five semester/eight trimester scholarship limit. These requirements differ from other scholarships offered in Tennessee that give recipients a grace period before enrolling in college or allow part-time enrollment.

[B] Promise students may enroll part time in a summer semester beginning in the summer 2024 term.

Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) Momentum Year 2023

Since the implementation of the Drive to 55 in 2014, there have been several college-going initiatives to help the state reach the goal of 55 percent of Tennesseans holding a postsecondary credential. The most recent initiative is the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's (THEC) Momentum Year 2023, which launched in October 2022. THEC designated 2023 as a year to "renew and articulate the value of education in Tennessee and to increase enrollment in education and training beyond high school." The idea for this year came after the release of THEC's first statewide college-going status report in 2021, which showed a five-year decline in college-going among Tennessee's high school graduates. THEC engaged with stakeholders to establish three main goals for 2023 as a momentum-building year:

- increase the college-going rate for the high school class of 2023 to at least 60 percent,
- increase adult enrollment in higher education through Tennessee Reconnect, and
- improve coordination and alignment in education and workforce training.

One of the early indicators for Momentum Year 2023 was the Tennessee Promise application rate for the high school seniors in the fall 2022 semester. More students applied for Tennessee Promise this year than in any year prior. Momentum Year is an effort to communicate to students that education or training beyond high school is valuable, important, and affordable. As 2023 progresses, THEC has and will continue to expand on momentum-building efforts through its outreach staff, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) marketing challenge, and help in reducing summer melt (i.e., students who intend to enroll in postsecondary education following high school graduation but never actually do). The momentum year is about reversing the recent decline in Tennessee's college-going rate by "clearly communicat[ing] the value of higher education and variety of education paths available to all Tennesseans."

Measuring the success of Tennessee Promise

This report focuses on measuring the success of Tennessee Promise's two objectives – college access and completion – through an evaluation of its processes and outcomes. Within those two objectives, there are measurable benchmarks.

OREA measured access by college-going rates (i.e., the number of high school graduates who enroll in college following graduation divided by the total number of high school graduates in a given year) and completion by credit hour accumulation, fall-to-fall retention, and degree attainment. OREA analyzed performance on these measures by student subgroup. Students from certain racial, gender, geographic, and socioeconomic subgroups have historically been less likely to enroll, persist, and earn a postsecondary credential, so the degree to which access and completion rates could increase for these subgroups is considerable.

In addition to measuring college access and completion, this report also evaluates the process students must follow to become and remain Promise students. Several steps within the Promise application process allow success to be measured: for example, application and FAFSA filing rates, mandatory meeting attendance, community service requirements, and postsecondary enrollment. Once enrolled in postsecondary education, there are requirements to maintain Promise eligibility, such as completing community service hours and maintaining full-time continuous enrollment. OREA has analyzed available data to measure success and identify program requirements most often missed by Promise applicants.

Report roadmap

This report is separated into five sections. Section 1 – "How Tennessee Promise works" (page 7) – covers basic information about the scholarship, including eligibility and requirements, costs covered, eligible institutions, and more. Section 2 – "Application and enrollment" (page 29) – dives into data from THEC to understand trends in enrollment in various student cohorts, institutions, and demographic groups. This section also explores access to Promise by analyzing data about students who apply for Promise and students who become Promise students. Section 3 – "Retention" (page 41) – examines how fall-to-fall retention rates of Promise students compare to non-Promise students. Section 4 – "Credential attainment" (page 52) – details attainment data for Promise students as compared to their peers. Section 5 – "What prevents success?" (page 60) – explores the obstacles that may impede student success.

Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	Section 4
		Complete application requirements	Enroll	Complete first year	Complete 5 semesters
	Cohort 1	Fall 2014 - Summer 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2017
	Cohort 2	Fall 2015 - Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2018
	Cohort 3	Fall 2016 - Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2019
How Tennessee Promise works	Cohort 4	Fall 2017 - Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2020
	Cohort 5	Fall 2018 - Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2021
	Cohort 6	Fall 2019 - Summer 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
	Cohort 7	Fall 2020 - Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2023
	Cohort 8	Fall 2021 - Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2024
	Cohort 9	Fall 2022 - Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2025

Included in evaluation
Not included in evaluation

Data collection and methods

OREA obtained quantitative and demographic data from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) for all Promise applicants, including those who did and did not become Promise students. OREA also referenced THEC's College Going Reports and County Profiles to situate Promise within Tennessee's broader college-going context. Completion data for cohorts 1 through 5 and enrollment data for cohorts 1 through 7 was available at the time of report writing.

For reliable comparisons, OREA narrowed its analysis to students who enrolled in an eligible institution the immediate fall semester after high school graduation. There are 114,959 such Promise students in cohorts 1 through 7. That number does not capture students who may have received leaves of absences or otherwise filed appeals, regained eligibility, and enrolled at a later date. There are 8,245 such Promise students. While this evaluation's analyses represent the 114,959 Promise students, approximately 123,204 students have enrolled as a Promise student since the program's inception.

To collect qualitative information, OREA conducted interviews, mostly in-person and some virtual, with all 13 of Tennessee's community colleges. Interviewees represented various departments and performed a wide range of roles, both student-facing and in school leadership. OREA also interviewed faculty and staff at four Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs). To include perspectives from the K-12 environment,

OREA interviewed high school counselors and district personnel from nine different school districts. Additionally, OREA interviewed staff and leadership at THEC, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), tnAchieves, and the Ayers Foundation Trust.

At the conclusion of the interview process, OREA crafted one survey for postsecondary employees and another for K-12 faculty and staff. OREA used a snowball sampling method for both surveys based on interactions with interviewees.

The community college and TCAT survey received 594 responses. Of those 594 respondents, 75 percent work at a community college and 25 percent at a TCAT. Of the 394 respondents who indicated their department, 35 percent work in student success, 19 percent work in admissions and records, 18 percent work in financial aid, and 11 percent work in academic affairs. The remainder work in administration, advancement, athletics, the bursar's office, external affairs, and are faculty members.

The K-12 survey received 257 responses. Respondents represented 82 different school districts and 160 different high schools. Of the 254 that indicated their job titles, 45 percent were principals or assistant principals, 43 percent were school counselors, 7 percent were college counselors, and 4 percent worked in administration.

Each survey instrument is included in an appendix to this evaluation.

Section 1: How Tennessee Promise works

Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	Section 4
		Complete application requirements	Enroll	Complete first year	Complete 5 semesters
How Tennessee Promise works	Cohort 1	Fall 2014 - Summer 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2017
	Cohort 2	Fall 2015 - Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2018
	Cohort 3	Fall 2016 - Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2019
	Cohort 4	Fall 2017 - Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2020
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	Cohort 6	Fall 2019 - Summer 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
	Cohort 7	Fall 2020 - Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2023
	Cohort 8	Fall 2021 - Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2024
	Cohort 9	Fall 2022 - Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2025

Included in evaluation
Not included in evaluation

The Tennessee Promise scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship for recent Tennessee high school graduates who complete all of the application requirements and enroll in an eligible credential program the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. Promise students may remain in the program until they earn an associate degree, diploma, or certificate, or until five semesters or eight trimesters have passed, whichever occurs first. The scholarships are funded by the Tennessee Promise Endowment, created in 2014.

This section explains the eligibility, application, and maintenance requirements for the Tennessee Promise scholarship, as well as terminating events and exceptions to the requirements. Additionally, it details the changes that were made to the program during the COVID-19 pandemic and explains the Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund.

Who is eligible to apply for Tennessee Promise?

Tennessee Promise is a residency-based scholarship, meaning that the application eligibility is determined primarily by legal residency in Tennessee. This differs from other Tennessee scholarships that may also require applicants to meet certain academic or financial need criteria. Students are eligible to apply for the Tennessee Promise scholarship if they:

- hold U.S. citizenship;
- live in Tennessee for at least 12 months prior to enrollment in a postsecondary institution;[C] and
- graduate from a Tennessee public or private secondary school, graduate from an out-of-state secondary school as a dependent child of an active-duty military parent, graduate from an out-of-state high school located in a neighboring state in a contiguous county to Tennessee, earn a high school diploma as a home school student, or obtain a high school equivalency credential before the age of 19.

[C] A Tennessee resident graduating from an out-of-state boarding school is also eligible to apply for Promise.

Tennessee Promise scholarship requirements

Requirements for Promise applicants

The Promise application process occurs during the senior year of high school and throughout the summer after high school graduation. To become a Tennessee Promise student, applicants must:

- complete the Tennessee Promise scholarship application by November 1 of the senior year of high school;
- file the FAFSA by the designated date;
- attend the mandatory meeting hosted by the mentor organization that serves the applicant's high school;[D] and
- complete and submit documentation of eight hours of community service by July 1. In lieu of community service hours, applicants may complete eight hours of job shadowing. A student can complete up to four hours of community service through virtual webinars.

> **Tennessee Promise applicant vs. student**
>
> A Promise *applicant* is a high school senior who has completed an application for Tennessee Promise but has not enrolled in a postsecondary institution.
>
> A Promise *student* is someone who has completed all of the eligibility requirements for the scholarship and has enrolled at an eligible postsecondary institution.

Students who fail to complete a Promise application or who do not file the FAFSA by the designated date may appeal to the TSAC Appeals Panel for consideration. For example, home school students who are not familiar with Promise requirements may appeal. Applicants who cannot attend the mandatory meeting are exempt from this requirement if they meet one of the following exceptions:

- participation in a school-sanctioned event (e.g. athletic event, competition, etc.),
- death in the immediate family,
- personal illness,
- conflict with a postsecondary course,
- conflict with a religious observance,
- personal or immediate family emergency,
- conflict with work schedule, or
- lack of transportation.

> Two partnering organizations serve Tennessee Promise applicants and students: tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust.

Students who miss the mandatory meeting for any of these reasons must notify their mentor organization prior to or after missing the meeting, submit an excuse form with documentation for the absence, and attend a makeup meeting to maintain eligibility for Promise. Students who cannot attend their mandatory meeting are also provided a webinar to make up the missed meeting. Students who miss the mandatory meeting for any reason other than those allowed are no longer eligible for Tennessee Promise, unless they attend a webinar provided by tnAchieves in lieu of the in-person meeting.

There is one other exception during the Promise application process: students who delay their enrollment in postsecondary education due to an approved medical or personal leave of absence are not required to complete the community service requirement by July 1. An applicant who does not enroll in an eligible postsecondary institution the fall semester immediately following high school graduation due to an approved leave of absence must submit their community service hours by the deadline for the semester in which they enroll, though they may be allowed to adjust the requirement if deemed appropriate for their situation. See page 10 for more information about leaves of absence.

[D] The mentor meetings in Ayers schools are one-on-one, as they have counselors embedded in the high schools.

Requirements for Promise students

Promise applicants officially become Promise students when they enroll in eligible degree programs at Promise-eligible institutions the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. Eligible degree programs are those with a curriculum leading to a certificate, diploma, or associate degree at a Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), community college, or public or private college or university that offers an associate degree or certificate that is eligible for a Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS). Promise students at eligible four-year institutions must enroll in courses leading to a certificate, diploma, or associate degree; they cannot enroll in courses leading to a bachelor's degree and remain eligible for the Tennessee Promise scholarship. See page 11 and Exhibit 1.1 for more on Promise-eligible institutions.

An eligible degree program is a curriculum of courses leading to a certificate, diploma, or associate degree.

Diploma or certificate: A credential, other than a degree, that indicates satisfactory completion of training in a program of study. Diplomas are offered at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs). Certificates are offered at TCATs and community colleges.

Students may earn a certificate while pursuing a diploma or an associate degree. Earning a terminal diploma, terminal certificate, or associate degree is a terminating event for Tennessee Promise students.

Associate degree: A two-year degree that typically requires successful completion of 60 credit hours, including general education and concentrated courses. Associate degrees are offered at community colleges and some public and private four-year institutions.

Specifically, a Promise student must:

- enroll as a full-time student in an eligible degree program at an eligible postsecondary institution in the fall semester immediately following graduation from high school or the attainment of a high school equivalency credential, unless the student has an approved medical or personal leave of absence; and
- if selected, complete a process called FAFSA verification, where students are randomly selected and required to provide documentation that verifies certain information on their FAFSA forms.

Maintaining the Promise scholarship

Tennessee Promise students must do the following to maintain the scholarship once enrolled in an eligible institution:

- maintain continuous full-time enrollment unless granted a personal or medical leave of absence;
- file the FAFSA annually;
- complete and submit documentation for eight hours of community service for each semester they use the scholarship; and
- maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA if enrolled in an associate degree, certificate, or diploma program, as calculated at the end of each academic year.

Promise students can transfer among Promise-eligible institutions if they meet all other Promise requirements. Transferring does not extend or reduce the maximum number of semesters or trimesters that a student may receive the Promise scholarship.

Terminating events

Students may continue to receive the Tennessee Promise scholarship until one of the following occurs:

- The student earns a terminal diploma, certificate, or associate degree.[E]
- The student has attended an eligible postsecondary institution as a Tennessee Promise student for five consecutive semesters (if enrolled in an associate degree program) or eight consecutive trimesters (if enrolled at a TCAT), not including an approved leave of absence or a documented learning disability. The summer semester is not required for continuous enrollment unless a student is enrolled at a TCAT.
- The student fails to meet any of the continuing eligibility requirements while enrolled in a postsecondary institution, including:
  - dropping below a 2.0 GPA at the end of the academic year,
  - failing to complete and/or report eight hours of community service by the designated deadline each semester,
  - not maintaining continuous, full-time enrollment,[F] or
  - failing to refile the FAFSA application annually.

Exceptions to the scholarship requirements

There are some exceptions to the Tennessee Promise scholarship requirements once a student is enrolled at a postsecondary institution.

Personal or medical leave of absence:

- Provided that all other requirements have been met, students may be exempt from timely enrollment in the initial semester and/or continuous enrollment if granted a medical or personal leave of absence for reasons including, but not limited to, illness of the student, illness or death of an immediate family member, extreme financial hardship, fulfillment of a religious commitment, or fulfillment of National Guard active duty. Each institution's Institutional Review Panel considers requests for personal and medical leaves of absences.
- Students enrolling at a TCAT may be granted a personal leave of absence if their chosen program of study has no available openings or only begins in the spring or summer term. Students enrolling at a TCAT may enroll in their program of study in the summer term after high school graduation if the program has openings and they have completed the community service requirement (i.e., community service hours are due by April 1 for enrollment in the summer term).
- Promise students with approved personal or medical leaves of absence are not required to complete community service hours for semesters or trimesters in which they are not enrolled.

Full-time enrollment exceptions:

- A student may enroll less than full time if he or she has a documented disability.
- A student may enroll less than full time if such enrollment is required for the program of study for a semester.
- A student may enroll less than full time if the student is in the graduation semester and the program of study requires less than full-time enrollment for credential completion.

[E] A student may continue to receive the Tennessee Promise Scholarship after earning a diploma or certificate if they are enrolled in a sequential diploma or certificate program.
[F] Exceptions apply to students with approved personal or medical leaves of absence or documented learning disabilities.

Summer term:

- Students enrolled at a TCAT are required to enroll in the summer term to maintain continuous enrollment.
- Students enrolled at a community college or eligible four-year institution may enroll part time during a summer semester.[G]

Promise-eligible institutions

Tennessee Promise students can use the scholarship at any of Tennessee's community colleges or TCATs. They can also use Promise at a public or private four-year college or university that has a qualifying associate degree program. See Exhibit 1.1 for a full list of Promise-eligible institutions.

Exhibit 1.1: Promise-eligible institutions include community colleges, TCATs, and select public and private colleges and universities

Community colleges		
Chattanooga state	Motlow State	Southwest Tennessee
Cleveland State	Nashville State	Volunteer State
Columbia State	Northeast State	Walters State
Dyersburg State	Pellissippi State	
Jackson State	Roane State	
Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs)		
TCAT Athens	TCAT Hohenwald	TCAT Morristown
TCAT Chattanooga	TCAT Jacksboro	TCAT Murfreesboro
TCAT Crossville	TCAT Jackson	TCAT Nashville
TCAT Crump	TCAT Knoxville	TCAT Northwest
TCAT Dickson	TCAT Livingston	TCAT Oneida/Huntsville
TCAT Elizabethton	TCAT McKenzie	TCAT Paris
TCAT Harriman	TCAT McMinnville	TCAT Pulaski
TCAT Hartsville	TCAT Memphis	TCAT Shelbyville
TCAT Henry/Carroll		
Public four-year		
Austin Peay State University	Tennessee State University	University of Tennessee, Southern*
Private four-year**		
Aquinas College†	Freed-Hardeman University	Southern Adventist University
Art Institute of Nashville†	Hiwassee College†	Tennessee Temple University†
Baptist College of Health Sciences	John A. Gupton College	Trevecca Nazarene University
Bethel University	Johnson University	Union University†
Bryan College	King University	South College
Carson-Newman University	Lane College	Tusculum College
Christian Brothers University	LeMoyne-Owen University	Welch College
Cumberland University	Lincoln Memorial University	William R. Moore College of Technology

Notes: *Martin Methodist College (private) became UT Southern in July 2021 and is no longer an eligible institution.

** Not all of these private colleges and universities have had Promise students each year. This is a list of those that have had at least one cohort of Promise students enroll.

† These are no longer eligible institutions.

[G] Promise students may enroll part time in a summer semester beginning in the summer 2024 term.

Promise scholarship by institution type

If a Promise student attends a TCAT or a community college, tuition and mandatory fees, averaging about $4,119 and $4,537 per year respectively, for on-campus courses will be covered in full. These charges may be covered solely through gift aid that is applied prior to the Promise award, by a combination of the Tennessee Promise scholarship and gift aid, or entirely with Tennessee Promise scholarship dollars.

If a Promise student attends an eligible public or private four-year institution, the Tennessee Promise scholarship award amount is the average cost of tuition and mandatory fees at Tennessee's community colleges (about $4,500, less any gift aid applied before the Promise scholarship). For example, if a student attends a private university that charges $20,000 per year in tuition, that student will receive up to what he or she would receive as a Promise student at a community college ($4,500) and would be responsible for the remaining balance of $15,400 ($20,000 tuition minus $4,500 in Promise). Any other sources of gift aid (e.g., a federal Pell grant or the HOPE scholarship) would be applied to a student's bill first, and then Promise would cover the remaining balance up to $4,500 (the average cost of tuition and mandatory fees at a community college).

Exhibit 1.2: The average cost of tuition and mandatory fees for each category of Promise-eligible institution

The Tennessee Promise scholarship covers tuition and mandatory fees for on-campus courses in full at community colleges and TCATs.	
Institution	Average tuition and mandatory fees
TCATs	$4,119
Community colleges	$4,537
A Promise student could receive about $4,500 if they attend an eligible four-year institution and are responsible for the remaining balance of their tuition and mandatory fees.	
Public institutions	$8,958
Private institutions	$27,877

Partnering organizations

Tennessee Promise applicants are supported in their college-going process by a mentor. A Promise applicant is paired with a mentor during the application process for the Tennessee Promise scholarship. There are two Tennessee Promise partnering organizations that work with Promise applicants and students – the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves. As of the fall 2023 semester, the Ayers Foundation Trust serves students from 21 counties across the state and tnAchieves serves students in 74 counties.[H] Ayers counselors are embedded in high schools and in two community colleges, while tnAchieves recruits volunteer mentors from their service counties. Starting with the high school class of 2024, tnAchieves students will attend their mandatory meeting then decide if they would like to continue working with a mentor. Prior to the class of 2024, each Promise applicant was required to be paired with a mentor.

OREA surveyed 594 community college and TCAT officials who work with Promise students about the quality of services provided by the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves. Each respondent was asked which partner organization serves the *majority* of their students and a series of questions related to that organization. Respondents were asked to select Good, Fair, Poor, or Unsure when asked how well their partnering organization performed the following services:

- helping students transition from high school to postsecondary education,

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[H] The Ayers Foundation Trust will serve students in their newly expanded service counties beginning with the class of 2024. tnAchieves will continue to serve previous classes as they progress through the Tennessee Promise application process.

- helping students maintain eligibility for Promise,
- helping students access academic resources once enrolled in a postsecondary institution,
- helping students access community service opportunities, and
- helping students combat outside barriers.

Exhibit 1.3: The majority of respondents indicated that the services provided by the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves are "good" or "fair"
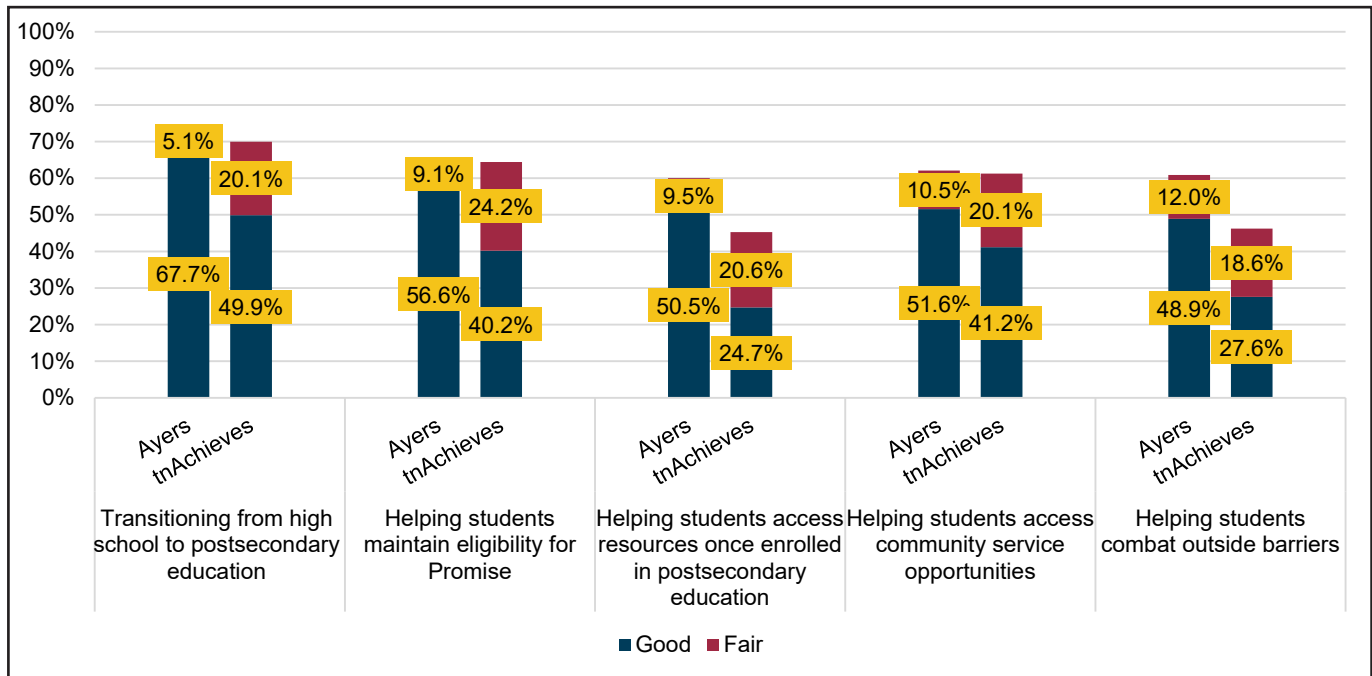
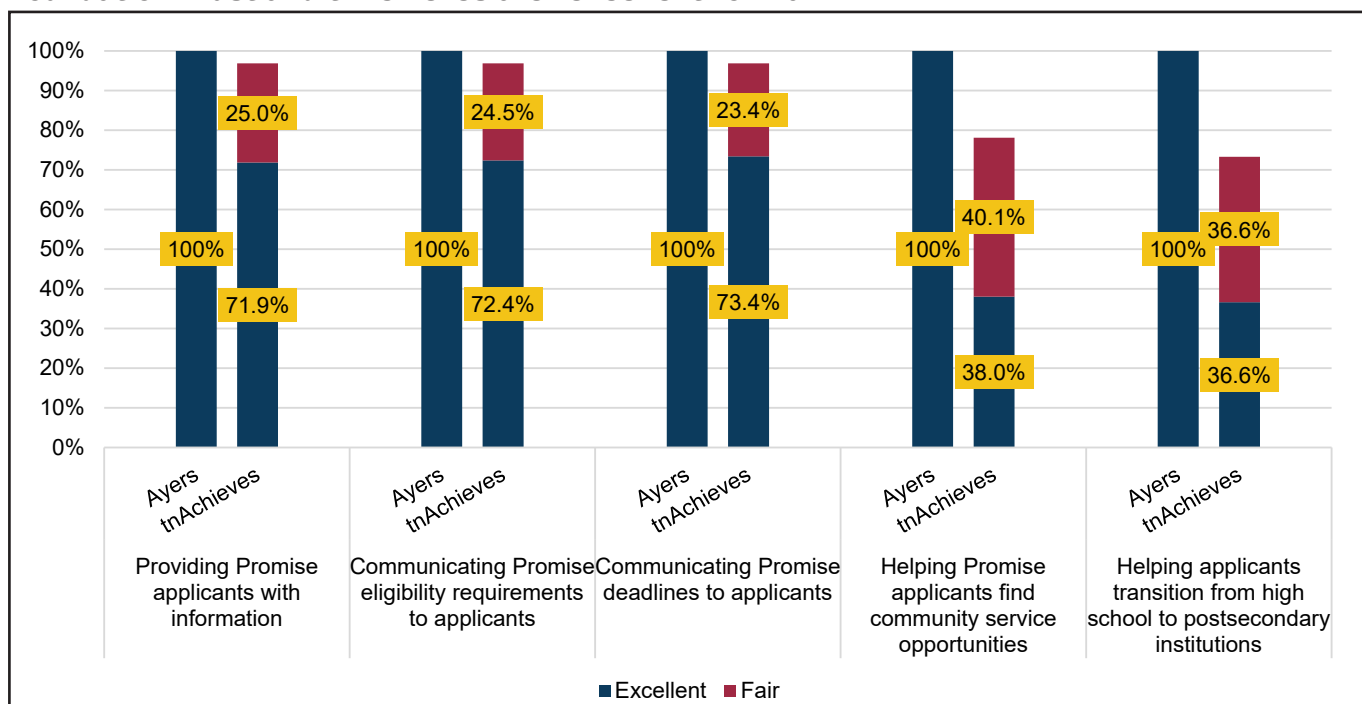Source: OREA analysis of survey data.

OREA also surveyed 257 high school counselors, principals, and district personnel. These respondents were asked to indicate which mentor organization works with their county and were asked similar questions to those asked to postsecondary institutions. They were asked to select Excellent, Fair, Poor, or Unsure when asked about the following services provided by their mentor organization:

- providing Tennessee Promise applicants with information,
- communicating Promise eligibility requirements to applicants,
- communicating Promise deadlines to applicants,
- helping Promise applicants find community service opportunities, and
- helping applicants transition from high school to postsecondary institutions.

In interviews with administrators of community colleges, TCATs, and high schools, respondents shared mixed reviews on how they feel about the Tennessee Promise mentoring component. According to tnAchieves, the goal of the mentorship program is threefold: to ensure the value proposition is being met, to serve as a resource for students, and to be a task manager for students. When asked to share their thoughts on the role of Promise mentors, some high school counselors and administrators said they appreciate the way mentors are recruited and think the mentoring component of the program works well. Others shared that students in their district are often confused by the mentoring and the mentors do not always represent the students that they are serving in terms of racial identity and socioeconomic background.

Exhibit 1.4: The majority of respondents indicated that the services provided by the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves are "excellent" or "fair"

Source: OREA analysis of survey data.

In interviews with representatives from community colleges and TCATs, several individuals mentioned that they think the program is effective for students who do not have this type of support at home. Others said it is difficult to keep students engaged in the process and is discouraging when students do not respond. Many interviewees expressed concern that students do not know who to turn to when they have a question due to overcommunication by too many involved individuals. For example, students will confuse their mentor with their college advisor or their COMPLETE Coach. Others mentioned that there are varying degrees of helpfulness from mentors; some are very involved while others end up giving students incorrect information.

Completion grants

Public Chapter 512 (2021) established a four-year pilot program to provide additional aid for eligible Promise students who have an "immediate financial need . . . that may prevent the student from completing a postsecondary degree or credential." The program is funded by a $1 million nonrecurring appropriation not to exceed $250,000 per year and allocated to the partnering organizations based on number of service counties. The Ayers Foundation Trust receives $33,000 per year and tnAchieves receives $217,000 per year.

In the second year of the pilot program, the General Assembly appropriated an additional nonrecurring sum of $14.5 million to tnAchieves to expand completion grants and complete coaching over a five-year period. tnAchieves receives $2.9 million a year in addition to its original share of $217,000 each year.

> The General Assembly funded the Completion Grant pilot in 2021.
>
> These grants are funded by a $1 million nonrecurring appropriation, allocated between tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust.

THEC/TSAC and the Tennessee Promise partnering organizations, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust, administer completion grants. Students may request a completion grant to cover any of the five categories of financial hardship: food, housing, transportation, books/supplies, or class-specific fees. Promise students apply for a completion grant through their mentor organization's website and request up to $1,000 per semester or $625 per trimester.

In addition to the funding, the student also receives proactive, high impact coaching. A Promise student must participate in this coaching to receive a completion grant.

In the first year of the completion grant pilot program, students served by tnAchieves with a zero-dollar expected family contribution (EFC) were eligible for a grant and students served by the Ayers Foundation needed to be Pell grant recipients to be eligible for a grant. The Ayers Foundation Trust awarded over 150 grants and tnAchieves awarded over 1,100, depleting available funds within 10 weeks.

In the second year of the pilot program, the eligibility for tnAchieves students expanded to any level of Pell eligibility. In 2022 the General Assembly also funded a completion grant expansion of $14.5 million. The expansion funding goes to tnAchieves for grants and to expand the organization's COMPLETE coaching initiative. By December 2022, tnAchieves had administered $1.48 million of the $1.6 million budgeted for the 2022-23 school year in completion grants to 2,855 students. The organization allocated $1.3 million of the expansion money to coaching for the 2022-23 school year.

Completion grants are not widely understood by community college and TCAT officials in the state. OREA surveyed community college and TCAT officials who have some level of involvement with Promise students, and slightly over half of those who responded indicated that they were not aware of completion grants. However, of the officials who indicated they are aware of the grants, nearly 75 percent indicated that they are helpful to students.

Promise requirements and the COVID-19 pandemic

Several Tennessee Promise scholarship requirements were adjusted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The General Assembly passed Public Chapter 632 in 2020, which provided the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) Executive Director with the authority to make changes to financial aid programs, including Promise, when the state was under a state of emergency as declared by the governor. Each of the following changes was temporary and is no longer in place for the current Tennessee Promise student cohorts.

Summary of changes to Tennessee Promise during COVID-19 pandemic

- Spring 2020–summer 2021 students could take a leave of absence.
- Deadlines were extended for cohort 7.
- The mandatory meeting was virtual.
- Community service was waived and then made virtual.
- 2020 graduates were given a gap year option.

Promise students were allowed to request a leave of absence due to COVID-19 in the spring 2020 through summer 2021 semesters

Under program rules, Promise students can request a personal or medical leave of absence from timely enrollment in the initial semester, full-time attendance, or continuous enrollment for circumstances beyond their control as long as all other eligibility criteria has been met. Starting in the spring 2020 semester, TSAC issued a series of memos to institutions stating that the COVID-19 pandemic constituted an extraordinary circumstance and therefore Promise students could be granted a leave of absence because of the pandemic. Promise students were still required to follow their institution's process for requesting a leave of absence but were not required to submit documentation to justify why the pandemic would necessitate a leave of absence. This guidance was extended for each semester until the summer 2021 semester.

The Promise application and FAFSA filing deadlines were extended by one month for 2021 high school graduates

Under program requirements, high school seniors are required to fill out a Promise application in the fall and file the FAFSA by the spring deadline to be eligible for the program. Failure to apply for Promise or file the FAFSA by the deadline results in permanent loss of Tennessee Promise eligibility. If a student misses the application or FAFSA deadline(s) they may file an appeal or else lose eligibility. In 2020, the Promise application deadline was extended from November 2 to December 1, and the FAFSA filing deadline was extended from February 1 to March 1, 2021.

The mandatory mentor meeting was held as a virtual webinar in spring 2020 through spring 2022

Tennessee Promise applicants are typically required to attend an in-person mandatory meeting on a specified date and time, which is typically held during the school day at their high school. Promise applicants in cohorts 6-8 participated in their mandatory mentor meeting by viewing a webinar and answering corresponding questions before the deadline. Failure to complete this requirement results in a permanent loss of Promise eligibility.

The community service requirement was waived for the summer 2020 through summer 2021 semesters

Program rules require Promise applicants and students to complete eight hours of community service prior to each semester that they participate in the program. This requirement was temporarily waived beginning in the summer 2020 semester through the summer 2021 semester. In the fall 2021 semester through summer 2022, the guidance was updated to reinstate the eight-hour community service requirement, but all eight hours could be completed virtually. As of the fall 2022 semester, students are allowed to complete four hours virtually, but the other four must be completed in person. Failure to complete the required community service requirement results in a permanent loss of Promise eligibility.

Promise applicants who graduated from high school in 2020 could choose to defer their enrollment until the fall 2021 semester

Program rules require Promise applicants to enroll in an eligible postsecondary institution in the fall semester immediately following their high school graduation. In the spring of 2021, TSAC issued a memo stating that Promise applicants who graduated from high school in the spring of 2020 and completed every requirement for Tennessee Promise but did not immediately enroll in a postsecondary institution in the fall of 2020 were now eligible to enroll as a Promise student in the fall 2021 semester. These students had to submit the FAFSA and complete eight hours of community service[1] by the July 1, 2021, deadline in order to maintain their eligibility.

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[1] Students who previously submitted community service hours for the fall 2020 semester did not have to submit them again.

Costs covered by Tennessee Promise

The Tennessee Promise scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship that covers tuition and mandatory fees (i.e., those that are required for attendance and are charged to all students) for on-campus courses. The scholarship does not cover fees for specific courses or labs, online courses, books, or supplies, and may be applied to online courses up to the cost of an in-person course.

> Tennessee Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees after gift aid has been awarded. It does not cover books or other non-mandatory fees.

Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship

> Tennessee Promise is applied after other sources of gift aid have been applied. Examples of gift aid include:
> - HOPE
> - General Assembly Merit Scholarship
> - Wilder-Naifeh Grant
> - Tennessee Student Assistance Award
> - Federal Pell Grant

As a last-dollar scholarship, Tennessee Promise is applied after other sources of gift aid have been applied to a student's account. Gift aid for the purpose of the Tennessee Promise scholarship includes the federal Pell grant, the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS), and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA). Since the Tennessee Promise scholarship is applied after these sources of gift aid, a Promise student's award amount can range from zero dollars to the full cost of tuition and mandatory fees for on-campus courses at a TCAT or community college, or a comparable amount at an eligible four-year university.

See pages 20-23 for more information about how Tennessee Promise works with other public scholarships to be a last-dollar scholarship.

Costs not covered by Tennessee Promise

The Tennessee Promise scholarship covers tuition and mandatory fees for on-campus courses, defined as tuition and fees that are required for enrollment or attendance and are charged to all students, such as the student government fee, parking fee, and student activity fee.

Non-mandatory fees

Non-mandatory fees are not covered by the Tennessee Promise scholarship. They include fees that are not charged to all students, such as those for specific courses and programs of study. These include:
- science lab fees;
- program specific fees;
- textbooks, supplies, tools, and uniforms at TCATs; and
- online course fees.

> Examples of non-mandatory course fees:
> - $15 (per credit hour) science lab fee at Roane State
> - $20 (per credit hour) Nursing and Allied Health course fee at Southwest TN
> - $55 (per credit hour) applied music fee at Motlow State
> - $100 fee for Licensed Practical Nursing courses at TCAT Chattanooga

Online course fees: institution-based courses and TN eCampus

Tennessee Promise students may choose to enroll in online courses either in addition to or instead of attending in-person classes.

Online courses for students enrolled in Tennessee community colleges fall into two categories: (1) TN eCampus online courses and (2) institution-based online courses. TN eCampus courses are developed and taught through a collaborative effort among Tennessee public colleges and universities, are delivered fully

online, and are available to students enrolled in any community college and some public universities. TN eCampus courses may be taught by a professor from a different institution than the community college in which the student is enrolled. A student can complete a degree solely through TN eCampus courses or may take TN eCampus courses to satisfy some degree requirements. A student who enrolls in TN eCampus courses must also be enrolled in a community college, which is considered the student's "home" institution for admission, registration, and the awarding of a degree.

> The Tennessee Promise scholarship will cover up to the amount of tuition and mandatory fees charged to a student enrolled in an equal number of credit hours on campus.

The other category of online courses for students enrolled in Tennessee community colleges is institution-based online courses. These courses are developed and taught by instructors at a specific community college and are only available to students enrolled in that institution. The availability of institution-based online courses varies by community college and semester, and such courses may be offered entirely online or through a hybrid format (i.e., part of the course is taught in the classroom and part is taught online).

Students may enroll in a combination of traditional on-campus, TN eCampus, and institution-based online courses and are charged tuition and fee rates for each type of course. For both online course types, the Tennessee Promise scholarship will cover up to the amount that would be charged to a student enrolled in an equal number of courses on campus. Any remaining balance is the financial responsibility of the student.

Institution-based online courses

Institution-based online courses are subject to the same tuition rate and mandatory fees charged for traditional on-campus courses. All 13 community colleges charge the same tuition rate, while mandatory fees vary. Several community colleges have charged fees for online courses in the past, but the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) has suspended online course fees since the fall 2021 semester in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. With online course fees now suspended, the Tennessee Promise scholarship will cover the tuition for institution-based online courses in full.

TN eCampus courses

TN eCampus courses are subject to a different tuition and fee rate than traditional on-campus courses and tuition is not reduced for hours enrolled over 12, as is the case for traditional on-campus courses. The Promise scholarship does not cover all of the tuition and fees charged for TN eCampus courses, and the remaining balance is the financial responsibility of the student. The amount of TN eCampus tuition and fees a Promise student is financially responsible for paying depends on the total number of credit hours in which the student enrolls, how many credit hours are TN eCampus courses versus traditional on-campus courses, and the community college attended.

> There is a $70 per credit hour fee to enroll in a TN eCampus course on top of the $176 per credit hour tuition cost.
>
> Tennessee Promise will cover up to the amount of tuition and mandatory fees charged to a student enrolled in an equal number of credit hours on campus.

For traditional on-campus courses, all 13 community colleges charge $176 per credit hour in tuition for the first 12 hours and $38 for each additional credit hour past 12 hours. Each community college charges a different amount for mandatory fees, with the fees for the fall 2023 semester ranging from $137 to $176. The TN eCampus tuition rate is also $176 per credit hour, but there is no cost reduction for credit hours beyond 12. Each community college charges $70 per credit hour ($210 per 3 hour course) for each eCampus course a student is enrolled in.

Exhibit 1.5: Traditional on-campus courses reduce tuition for credit hours past 12 – eCampus does not reduce tuition

	Traditional on-campus	eCampus
12 hours		
Tuition	$176 * 12 = $2,112	$176 * 12 = $2,112
Mandatory fees	$156	$70 * 12 = $840
Total	$2,268	$2,952
15 hours		
Tuition	($176 * 12) + ($38 * 3) = $2,226	$176 * 15 = $2,640
Mandatory fees	$156	$70 * 15 = $1,050
Total	$2,382	$3,690

Source: Community college websites.

A student's Tennessee Promise scholarship will cover eCampus tuition and fees up to the amount that would be charged for an equivalent course load of on-campus courses. The amount depends on three factors:

(1) the total number of hours in which a student is enrolled,

(2) the number of on-campus versus eCampus courses in which a student is enrolled, and

(3) the amount of mandatory fees charged at a student's home institution for a full-time student.

Exhibit 1.6: The three things needed to calculate how much "Student X" at Nashville State Community College will pay after Promise

How many total hours is the student enrolled in? ➡ 12 hours

How many hours are on campus? How many are eCampus? ➡ 9 on campus and 3 eCampus

How much is charged in mandatory fees at the student's community college? ➡ $137

Using this information, the following steps show what "Student X" will be financially responsible for after Promise pays.

1. Determine the total cost of tuition and mandatory fees.
    a. 9 hours of traditional on-campus courses: ($176 * 9) + $111 = $1,595
    b. 3 hours of eCampus: ($176 * 3) + ($70 * 3) = $738
    c. 12 hours total: $2,433
2. Determine the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for 12 on-campus credit hours.
    a. 12 hours at Nashville State: ($176 * 12) + $137 = $2,249
3. Find the difference between the two total costs.
    a. Total cost of credit hours ($2,433) – total cost of 12 on-campus hours ($2,249) = $184

In this example, "Student X" would be responsible for $184 after the Tennessee Promise scholarship has been applied to the bill.

The average cost of books, fees, and supplies

According to survey data collected from community college administrators, the average annual cost of books, fees, and supplies not covered by the Tennessee Promise scholarship is $1,000. For students attending community college, Tennessee Promise covers approximately 78 percent of the annual total cost of attendance including tuition, fees, supplies, and books.

According to survey data collected from TCAT administrators, the average annual cost of books, fees, and supplies not covered by Tennessee Promise for students attending a TCAT is $3,100. For students attending a TCAT, Promise covers approximately 57 percent of the annual total cost of attendance including tuition, fees, supplies, books, and tools.

Programs at TCATs vary on what is required for their program. The cost of supplies, tools, and uniforms can range widely depending on the program that a student is enrolled in. Below are two examples of extra costs for different programs at different schools.

Exhibit 1.7: Two TCAT program examples and what students are left to pay after Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees

	Student A	Student B
	Program: Welding Technology at TCAT Morristown	Program: Mechatronics at TCAT Memphis
Tuition	$3,870	$6,265
Mandatory fees	$249	$415
Total (Covered by TN Promise)	$4,119	$6,680
Estimated total program cost	$5,622	$9,109
What the student is financially responsible for	$1,503	$2,429

Note: Total estimated program cost includes books, tools, program fees, and uniforms, and is based on the full length of the program.

Tennessee Promise and other public scholarships

Tennessee Promise is one of several public scholarships available to Tennessee students attending a Promise eligible institution. As a last-dollar scholarship, Promise is applied after all other forms of aid have been applied to a student's tuition bill. Part of the application process for Promise is filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which allows the student to receive the maximum amount of federal and state aid before Promise is applied to their tuition and mandatory fees. For example, if a Promise student meets the academic criteria to receive the HOPE scholarship, HOPE will be applied to the student's tuition and mandatory fees bill before Tennessee Promise. Similarly, if a student meets the financial need to receive the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA) or a federal Pell grant, that aid will be applied before Tennessee Promise. Tennessee Promise fills in the gap between what is covered by other forms of gift aid and the remaining balance of a student's tuition and mandatory fees.

The Tennessee Promise scholarship can be used as backup plan for students who may lose their other gift aid after their first year of college. For example, if a student received the HOPE scholarship for their first year but fails to make the required 2.75 GPA, that student will lose HOPE funding for their second year.[J] Additionally, a student who received the maximum Pell grant award their first year may have a reduction in their award if their expected family contribution (EFC) changed on the FAFSA. In both of these scenarios, a student's Tennessee Promise scholarship will now cover the costs that were covered by other forms of gift aid in those students' first year.[K]

[J] HOPE can be regained once the student meets the GPA criteria.
[K] A student must maintain all of the eligibility criteria for Tennessee Promise to kick in during the second year.

Promise and the HOPE scholarship

Students at a community college or a four-year public or private institution may also be eligible to receive the HOPE scholarship. In order to receive the HOPE scholarship, entering freshmen must be Tennessee residents and meet a minimum academic requirement (21 ACT or a 3.0 GPA). While receiving the scholarship, a student must maintain continuous enrollment. The application for HOPE is the FAFSA, and a student must resubmit a FAFSA each year to continue to receive the scholarship. A student must enroll within 16 months of high school graduation to remain eligible for the HOPE scholarship. If a student initially enrolls in an out-of-state postsecondary institution and decides to transfer back to an in-state institution, the student is eligible for HOPE provided that the other eligibility criteria has been met (i.e., Tennessee residency, continuous enrollment, minimum GPA). A student may enroll part time and receive the HOPE scholarship.[L]

> Tennessee Promise is applied to a student's tuition and mandatory fees after other forms of gift aid have been applied.
>
> Public scholarships such as HOPE, Wilder-Naifeh, TSAA, and the federal Pell grant are applied first, and then Promise covers the remainder of the student's tuition and mandatory fees.

A student may receive the HOPE scholarship and also be a Tennessee Promise student. In order for a student to use Tennessee Promise, he or she must be enrolled full time. As a full-time student, HOPE will cover $1,600 per semester (or $3,200 per year) at a community college. The cost of tuition for 12 hours (i.e., full time) at a community college is $2,112 per semester, or $4,224 per year for the 2023-24 school year. The average cost of mandatory fees at Tennessee's community colleges is $156 per semester, or $312 per year. Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that will cover the remaining balance of a student's tuition and mandatory fees after the HOPE scholarship is applied. For the 2023-24 school year, the remaining balance between tuition and mandatory fees and the HOPE award amount is $2,424, which Tennessee Promise will cover in full.

In this scenario, a student is using two scholarships with differing eligibility criteria. While the HOPE scholarship does not require a student to enroll full time, Promise does require full-time enrollment. The HOPE scholarship does not require a student to fill out a separate application; the Promise scholarship does. The HOPE scholarship does not require a student to complete and submit community service, but the Promise scholarship does.

Exhibit 1.8: Example of how much a community college student receives from Promise after the HOPE scholarship has been applied

Cost of tuition and mandatory fees	$4,224
HOPE scholarship	$3,200
Tennessee Promise covers the remaining tuition and mandatory fees after gift aid has been applied.	
Tennessee Promise	$2,424
The student is responsible for books, tools, and supplies.	

Promise and the Wilder-Naifeh grant

Tennessee Promise students at a Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) may also be eligible to receive the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant for $2,000 per academic year, or up to the cost of attendance, whichever is less. Students apply for the Wilder-Naifeh grant by completing a FAFSA and must enroll in a certificate or diploma program at a TCAT. To continue to earn the award, a student must maintain satisfactory academic progress and continuous enrollment. The Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant does not require a minimum number of enrollment hours for eligibility.

[L] A student using the HOPE scholarship must maintain their enrollment status throughout the semester (i.e., a student who starts the semester as a full-time student must remain full time, but if a student starts the semester part time, that student must maintain six or more hours that semester to remain eligible for HOPE.

Exhibit 1.9: Example of how much a TCAT student receives from Promise after the Wilder-Naifeh grant has been applied

Cost of tuition and mandatory fees	$4,119
Wilder-Naifeh Grant	$2,000
Tennessee Promise covers the remaining tuition and mandatory fees after gift aid has been applied.	
Tennessee Promise	$2,119
The student is responsible for books, tools, and supplies.	

Promise and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA)

Tennessee Promise students at a community college, TCAT, or a public or private four-year institution may also be eligible to receive the Tennessee Student Assistant Award (TSAA). TSAA is a residency and financial need-based scholarship for students enrolled at least half time and can be used for the cost of attendance at an institution, including tuition, fees, and room and board. A student's TSAA award may not exceed the total cost of attendance when combined with other financial aid received.

Promise and the federal Pell grant

The federal Pell grant is awarded to students with exceptional financial need who have not yet earned a bachelor's degree for up to 12 semesters. A student's Pell grant award amount is based on the total cost of attendance at his or her chosen institution,[M] the number of hours enrolled, and the student's expected family contribution (EFC). A student's EFC is calculated annually by information provided on the FAFSA using a formula that considers family income (including taxed and untaxed income, assets, and public assistance), family size, and the number of family members attending college. In the 2023-24 academic year, the maximum Pell grant award is $7,395 for the full year. Students who receive the maximum Pell grant are considered full Pell grant recipients and students who receive less than the maximum are considered partial Pell grant recipients. A student's Pell grant is applied to their bill before Tennessee Promise is applied. See Exhibit 1.10 for a full breakdown of EFC and award amounts since Tennessee Promise was implemented.

Exhibit 1.10: Maximum Pell grant award amounts grow each academic year
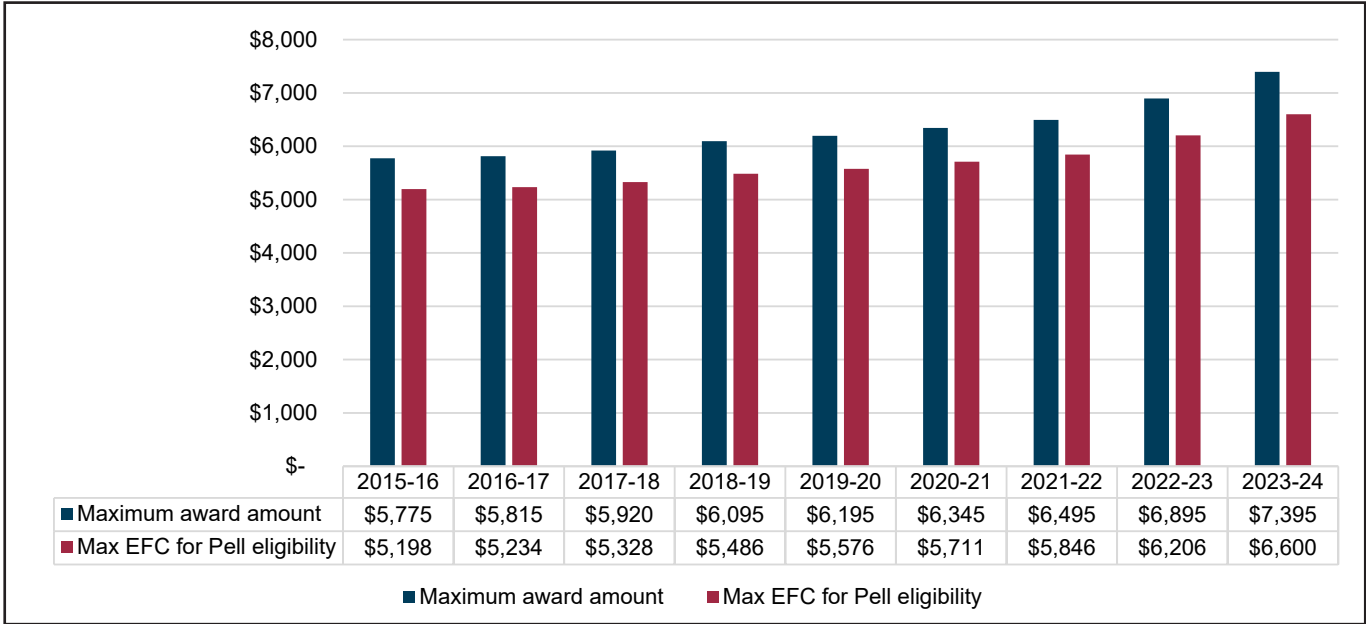
Promise cohort	Academic year	Maximum EFC for Pell eligibility	Maximum award amount	Cohort included in this evaluation?
1	2015-16	$5,198	$5,775	Yes
2	2016-17	$5,234	$5,815	Yes
3	2017-18	$5,328	$5,920	Yes
4	2018-19	$5,486	$6,095	Yes
5	2019-20	$5,576	$6,195	Yes
6	2020-21	$5,711	$6,345	Yes
7	2021-22	$5,846	$6,495	Yes
8	2022-23	$6,206	$6,895	No
9	2023-24	$6,600	$7,395	No

Source: OREA analysis of federal Pell grant schedules.

[M] The total cost of attendance includes the cost of tuition, fees, books, supplies, living expenses, and transportation.

Exhibit 1.11 shows how the maximum Pell grant award has grown since the first year of Tennessee Promise. Along with it, the maximum expected family contribution has also grown. The largest single year increase of the maximum Pell award amount occurred between the 2022-23 school year and 2023-24, when it grew from $6,895 to $7,395, an increase of $500.

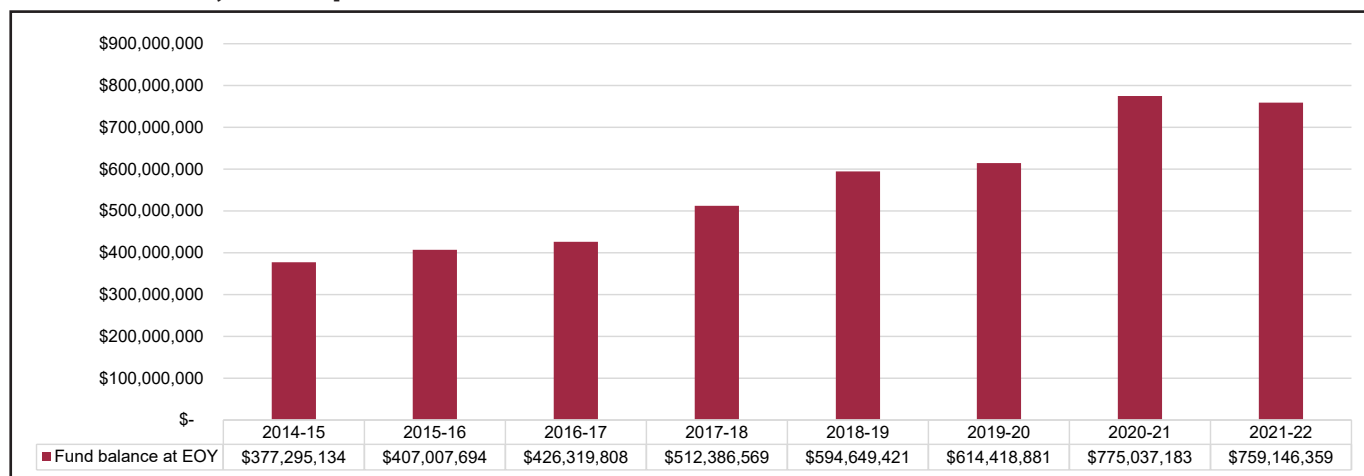**Exhibit 1.11: The maximum award amount per year and the maximum expected family contribution per year since Promise began**

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Maximum award amount	$5,775	$5,815	$5,920	$6,095	$6,195	$6,345	$6,495	$6,895	$7,395
Max EFC for Pell eligibility	$5,198	$5,234	$5,328	$5,486	$5,576	$5,711	$5,846	$6,206	$6,600

Source: OREA analysis of federal Pell grant schedules.

Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund

Tennessee Promise scholarships are funded by the Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund. The fund was established by Public Chapter 900 in 2014 with $361 million in principal, which is designated as nonspendable (i.e., required to remain intact). Funds from the endowment are invested annually by the State Treasurer and any revenue above the $361 million nonspendable principal is available for scholarships and administrative costs. The endowment was created with the intention that it would become self-sustaining (i.e., its annual investment earnings would be enough to cover the costs of the scholarship each year), so that the scholarship funding would not depend on annual state budget allocations.

From 2014-15 to 2021-22, the amount of funding available for scholarships increased by about $381.8 million, with the total fund balance increasing from $377.3 million to $759.1 million. The fund peaked in FY 2021, reaching a total fund balance of $775 million. See Exhibit 1.12.
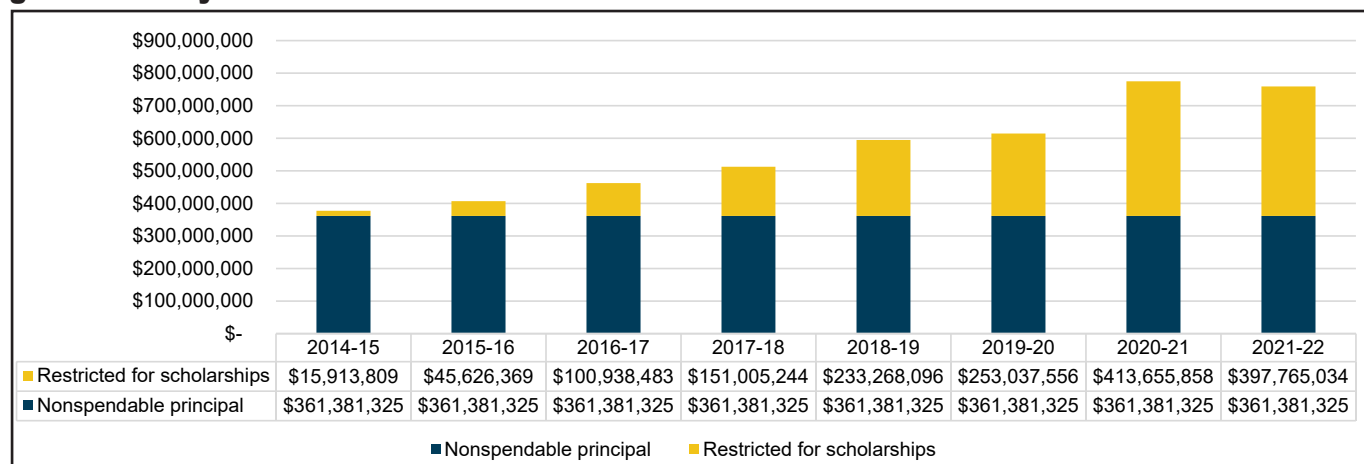
Exhibit 1.12: Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund annual fund balance has grown steadily since FY 2015, with a peak in FY 2021

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Fund balance at EOY	$377,295,134	$407,007,694	$426,319,808	$512,386,569	$594,649,421	$614,418,881	$775,037,183	$759,146,359

Source: Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment Fund balance sheets.

The fund comprises the $361 million nonspendable principal and the revenue generated from investment income, as well as other financing sources. (See list in "Revenue and expenditures.") Any revenue above the principal is available for scholarship payments and administrative costs. The graph in Exhibit 1.13 shows the ratio of principal to revenue in the fund since 2014.

Exhibit 1.13: The amount of restricted income in the Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund grew annually until FY 2021

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Restricted for scholarships	$15,913,809	$45,626,369	$100,938,483	$151,005,244	$233,268,096	$253,037,556	$413,655,858	$397,765,034
Nonspendable principal	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325	$361,381,325

Source: Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment Fund balance sheets.

Revenues and expenditures

Since 2014, the Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund has received revenue annually from a variety of sources, which include:

- interest accrued from the fund's investments,
- Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) operating funds,
- excess lottery reserves, and
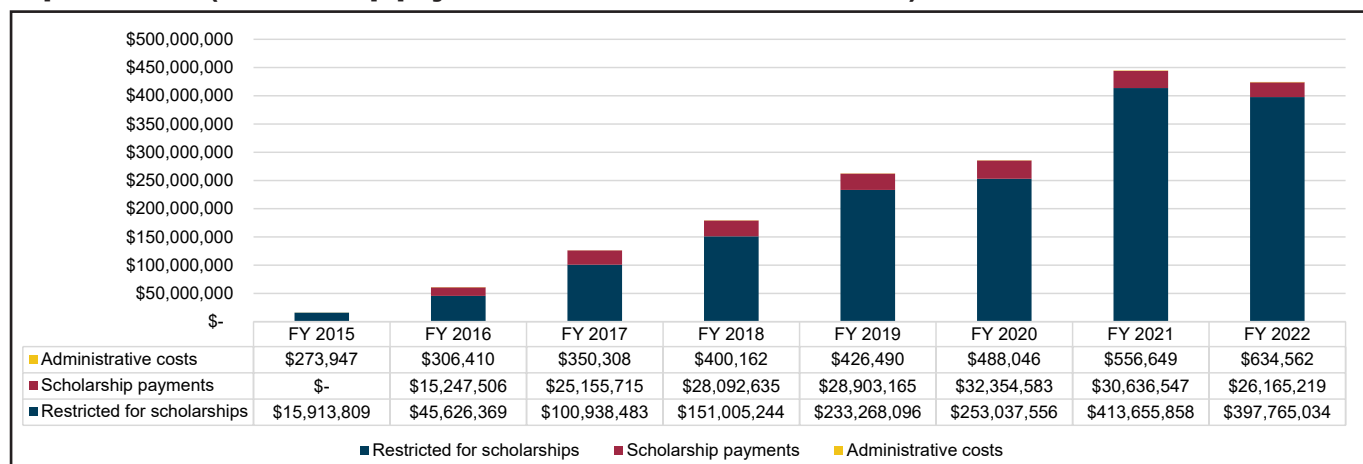- Tennessee Sports Wagering Council (SWC) licensure fees.

Exhibit 1.14: Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund revenues

Legend:
- Investment income
- TSAC operating fund
- Transfer from Lottery for Education account
- SWC money

1.0%
12.9%
12.3%
73.7%
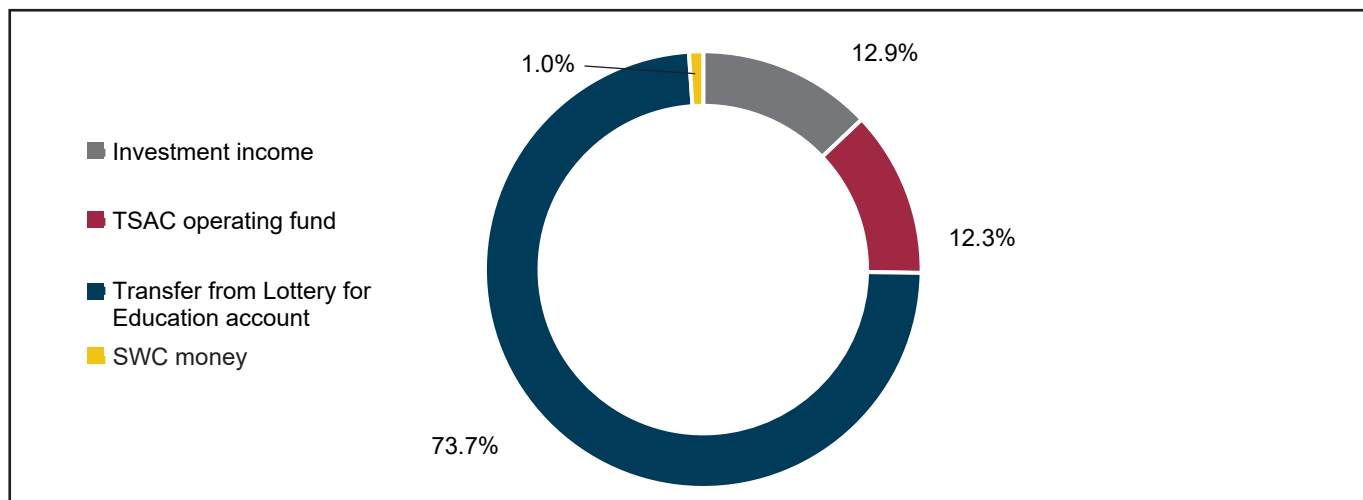
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment Fund balance sheets.

The endowment fund, aside from the $361 million non-spendable principal, may be spent on Tennessee Promise scholarship payments and administrative fees associated with overseeing the fund. The largest expense is for scholarships, with a total of $186,555,370 expended over the lifetime of the fund. Annually, a small portion of the fund is spent on administrative costs. At the end of each fiscal year, any unspent funds remain in the endowment rather than reverting to the general fund.

Exhibit 1.15: The total amount of money restricted for scholarships each year and the total expenditures (scholarship payments and administrative costs)

	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Administrative costs	$273,947	$306,410	$350,308	$400,162	$426,490	$488,046	$556,649	$634,562
Scholarship payments	$-	$15,247,506	$25,155,715	$28,092,635	$28,903,165	$32,354,583	$30,636,547	$26,165,219
Restricted for scholarships	$15,913,809	$45,626,369	$100,938,483	$151,005,244	$233,268,096	$253,037,556	$413,655,858	$397,765,034

Source: Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment Fund balance sheets.

The largest source of revenue for the fund over the years has been transfers from the Lottery for Education account. The initial $361 million endowment to establish this fund was drawn from the lottery account, and it has contributed money each year except fiscal years 2019 and 2020. In the eight years of the Promise fund's existence, the lottery account has put nearly $700 million into the Tennessee Promise account. The following graph shows the total revenue to expenditures of the fund in its lifetime.

Exhibit 1.16: The Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund generates far more revenue each year than it expends, with the exception of 2022

	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Total revenues	$377,569,081	$45,266,476	$80,818,137	$78,559,558	$111,592,507	$52,612,089	$191,811,498	$10,908,957
Total expenditures	$273,947	$15,553,916	$25,506,023	$28,492,797	$29,329,655	$32,842,629	$31,193,196	$26,799,781
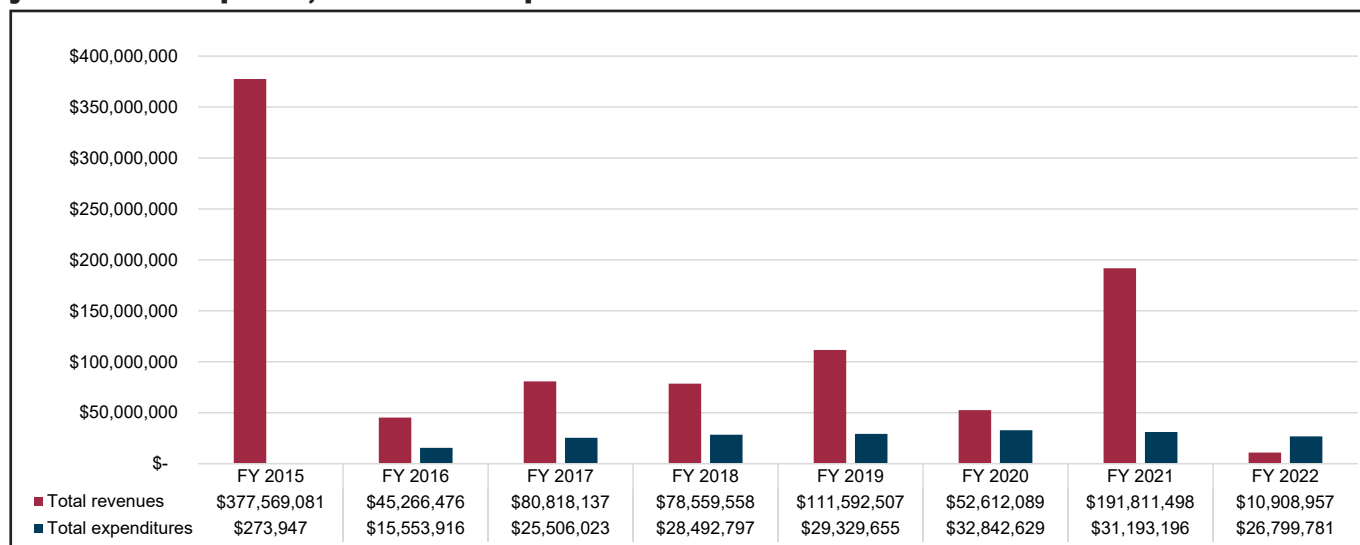
Source: OREA analysis of Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment balance sheets.

The Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund was created with the intention that it become self-sustaining, meaning its earned interest would be enough to cover scholarship payments each year. Exhibit 1.17 compares annual investment income to scholarship payments. Investment returns have been positive every year except for FY 2022 when the fund lost approximately $120 million in investment income.

Exhibit 1.17: Tennessee Promise Endowment Fund investment income compared to scholarship payments

	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Investment income	$6,187,756	$20,202,544	$21,072,343	$12,668,171	$42,705,592	$32,612,089	$109,565,845	$(122,327,635)
Scholarship payments	$-	$15,247,506	$25,155,715	$28,092,635	$28,903,165	$32,354,583	$30,636,547	$26,165,219
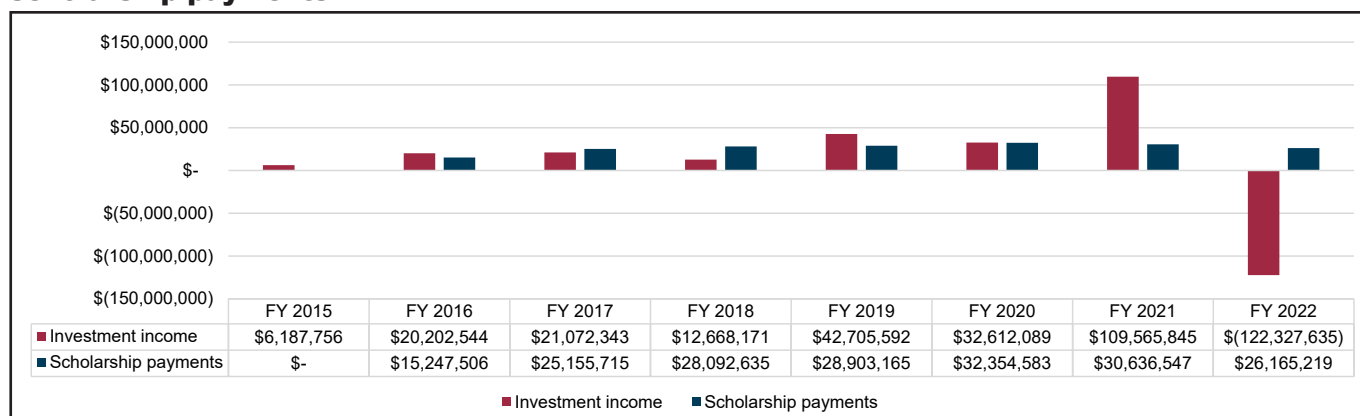
Source: Tennessee Promise Scholarship Endowment Fund balance sheets.

Scholarship payments per year

The Tennessee Promise scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship that covers a student's tuition and mandatory fees. Any gift aid that a student is awarded (i.e., HOPE or Pell) will be applied to a student's bill first, and then Promise will cover what is left. The two graphs below show the average dollar amount per academic semester awarded to Promise students.

The first graph is calculated using zero-dollar payments, which apply to students who are in the Tennessee Promise scholarship program but are receiving no Promise dollars because their tuition and mandatory fees are covered by other forms of gift aid. The second is calculated excluding the zero-dollar students, meaning only Promise students who receive at least $1 from Promise.

Exhibit 1.18: Average Promise payments, zero-dollar payments included

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
■ Fall	$521	$576	$580	$579	$594	$530	$592
■ Spring	$555	$620	$609	$600	$631	$563	$634
■ Summer	$903	$1,054	$664	$423	$749	$613	$240

■ Fall ■ Spring ■ Summer
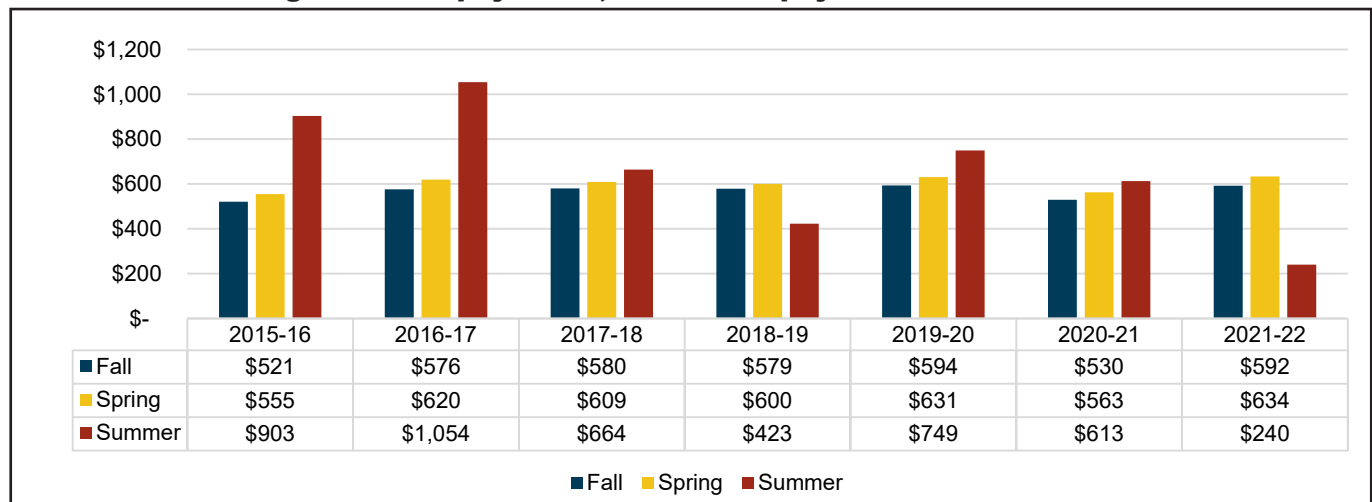
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 1.19: Average Promise payments, zero-dollar payments excluded

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
■ Fall	$985	$1,034	$1,071	$1,089	$1,128	$1,071	$1,112
■ Spring	$948	$1,022	$1,052	$1,073	$1,123	$1,050	$1,106
■ Summer	$1,072	$1,160	$1,058	$964	$876	$792	$835

■ Fall ■ Spring ■ Summer
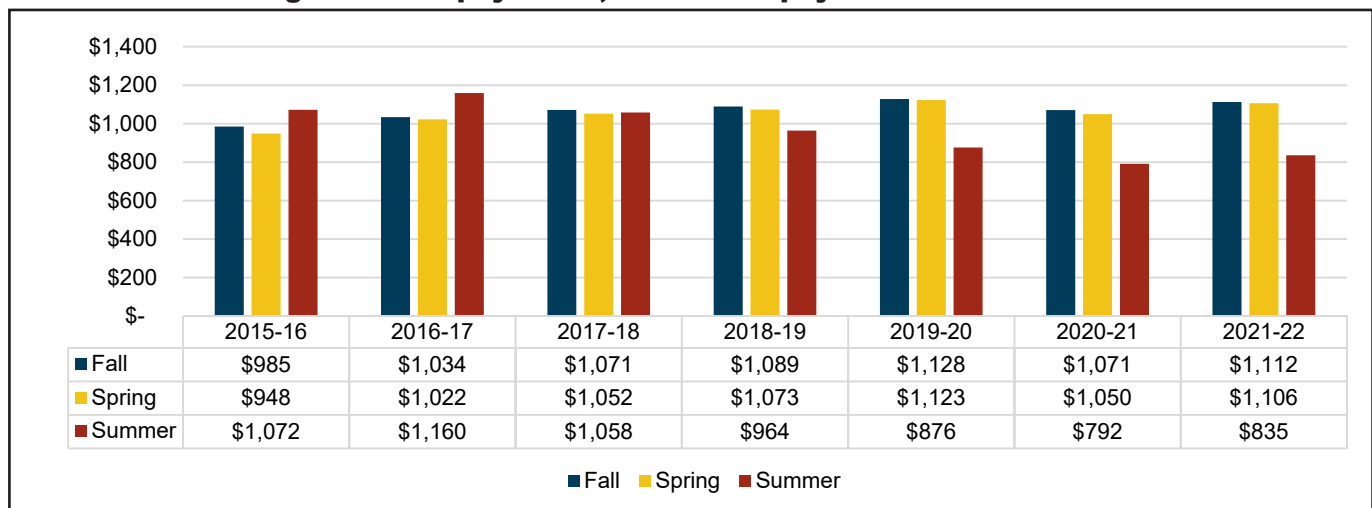
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Section 2: Application and enrollment

Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	Section 4
		Complete application requirements	Enroll	Complete first year	Complete 5 semesters
How Tennessee Promise works	Cohort 1	Fall 2014 - Summer 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2017
	Cohort 2	Fall 2015 - Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2018
	Cohort 3	Fall 2016 - Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2019
	Cohort 4	Fall 2017 - Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2020
	Cohort 5	Fall 2018 - Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2021
	Cohort 6	Fall 2019 - Summer 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
	Cohort 7	Fall 2020 - Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2023
	Cohort 8	Fall 2021 - Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2024
	Cohort 9	Fall 2022 - Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2025

Included in evaluation
Not included in evaluation

In this section, OREA analyzed Promise application, public enrollment, and financial aid data maintained and provided by THEC. Promise application data demonstrates who applied for the Promise scholarship, enrollment data confirms who enrolled at an eligible institution after applying for Promise, and financial aid data indicates whether those students became Promise students.

A Promise applicant is anyone who applied for the program by November 1 of their senior year of high school. A Promise student is an applicant that enrolled at an eligible institution the fall semester after high school graduation and maintained eligibility.[N] A Promise student that remains eligible for the program and enrolls at an eligible institution but does not receive any financial aid from the scholarship fund, meaning they were paid zero dollars, is still considered a Promise student.

> **Key Concept:**
>
> A student that receives a zero-dollar payment is still considered a Promise student.
>
> Throughout the report, payments are referred to as zero-dollar payments and non-zero-dollar payments.

Since 2015, nearly 430,000 students have applied for Tennessee Promise. On average, nearly 27 percent of those students became Promise students. Since students apply in November of their senior year, many factors between then and the following fall semester affect their enrollment decisions. Not every student that applies for Promise intends to become a Promise student. High schools, especially high school counselors, strongly encourage students to apply for Promise regardless of what their college plans may be. This phenomenon partially explains the drop-off between application numbers, eligibility criteria completion, and enrollment.

The chart in Exhibit 2.1 shows the number of applicants per cohort year, as well as the percent of applicants that completed each eligibility requirement, respectively. A student is in an enrolled cohort if they completed all application requirements, enrolled in an eligible institution, and have a Promise payment, whether zero dollars or otherwise, on file.

[N] Students who graduated high school in 2020 were permitted to delay their enrollment to the fall of 2021 due to COVID-19. Approximately 300 students did so. The subsequent analysis is not structured to include them in any cohort.

Not every Promise student receives Promise funds since it is a last-dollar scholarship, but applicants can still benefit from FAFSA filing support, mandatory mentor meetings, and the indication to college and university staff that they are eligible for funds should their financial situation change.

Exhibit 2.1: On average, just over a quarter of high school students who apply for Promise enroll as a Promise student

Requirements and Enrollment Status	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Cohort 6*	Cohort 7
Applied	57,678	59,378	60,435	62,399	64,240	64,067	61,662
Percent that filed FAFSA	79%	83%	86%	88%	88%	90%	86%
Percent that attended mandatory meeting	58%	59%	62%	65%	66%	78%	63%
Percent that completed community service	39%	40%	43%	44%	45%	N/A*	45%
Percent that became Promise students	27%	28%	28%	28%	27%	27%	23%

Note: For cohort 6, the community service requirement was waived.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

While application data for cohorts 8 and 9 was not available at the time this report was written, THEC notes that the high school graduating class of 2023, some of whom will comprise cohort 9, submitted a record-breaking number (64,612) of Promise applications in November 2022.

For consistent and reliable comparison, OREA narrowed its analysis to students who enrolled as Promise and non-Promise students the fall semester after graduating high school. Since the program's inception, 114,959 students started their postsecondary careers as Promise students the fall semester after graduating high school. There are an additional 8,245 students who became Promise students that may have had appeals that allowed for delayed enrollment. Including those students, Promise has served 123,204 students in cohorts 1 through 7.

Of the 114,959 Promise students analyzed in this evaluation, nearly 81 percent initially enrolled in a community college, just over 10 percent at a TCAT, and the remainder at a public university, private college, or in multiple systems (a two-year college and a four-year university simultaneously) in their first semester.

Exhibit 2.2: The majority of Promise students enroll at a community college
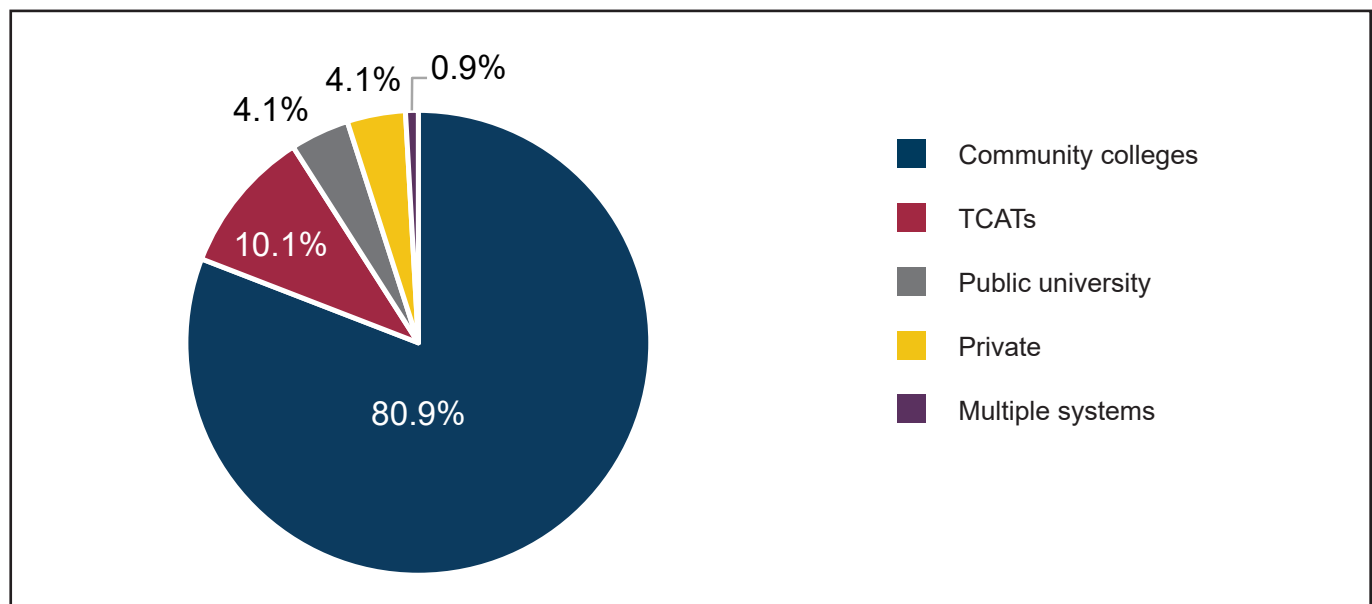
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Enrollment trends vary by system. The entire program saw an enrollment drop between cohorts 6 and 7, but Promise enrollment at TCATs has steadily grown while it has fluctuated at community colleges.

Exhibit 2.3: An unusually low number of Promise students enrolled at community colleges in the fall of 2021
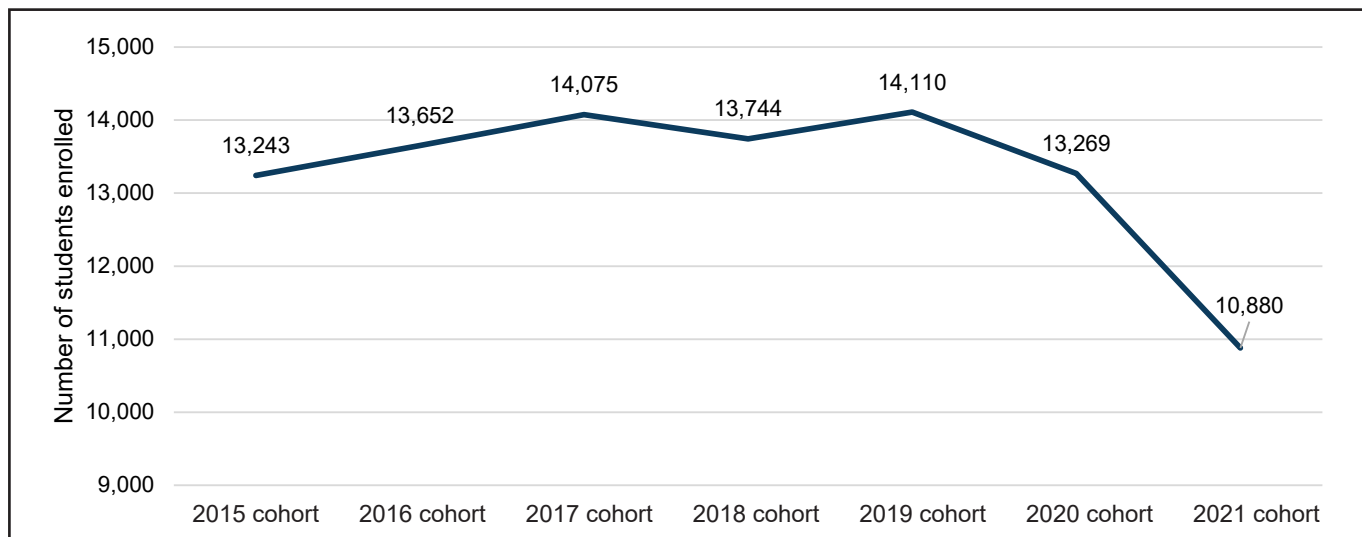
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 2.4: Promise student enrollment at TCATs has been steadily increasing, with a small decline in fall of 2021
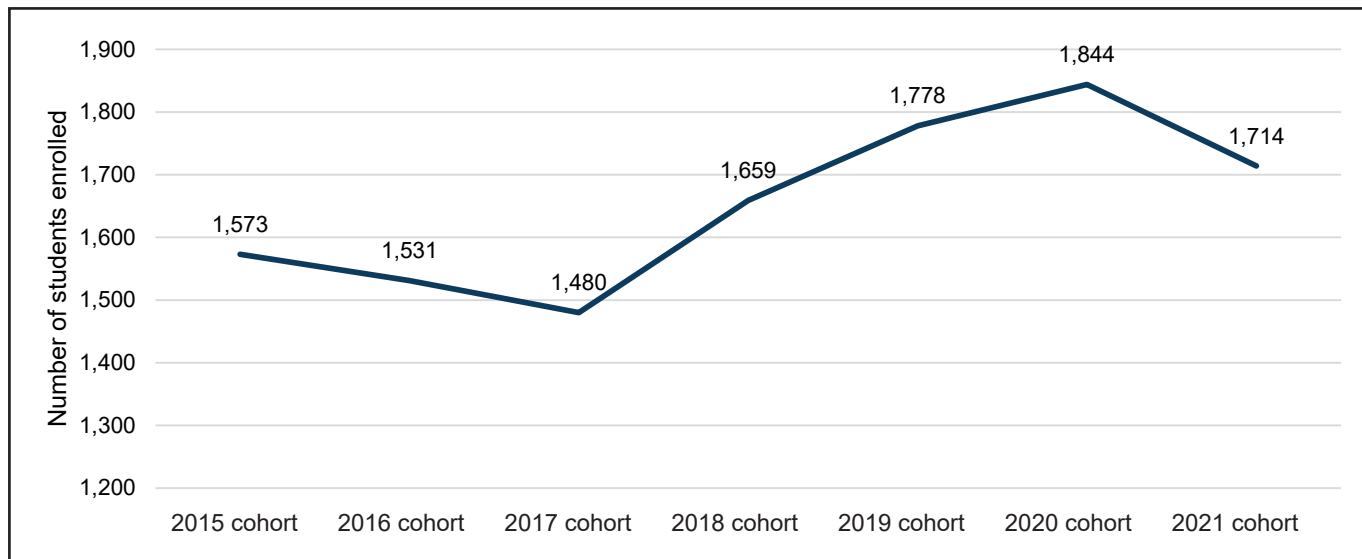
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Immediately after Tennessee Promise's implementation in 2014, the state witnessed an increase in the statewide college-going rate. Over time, the college-going rate has decreased, as shown in Exhibit 2.5.

Exhibit 2.5: Statewide college-going rate
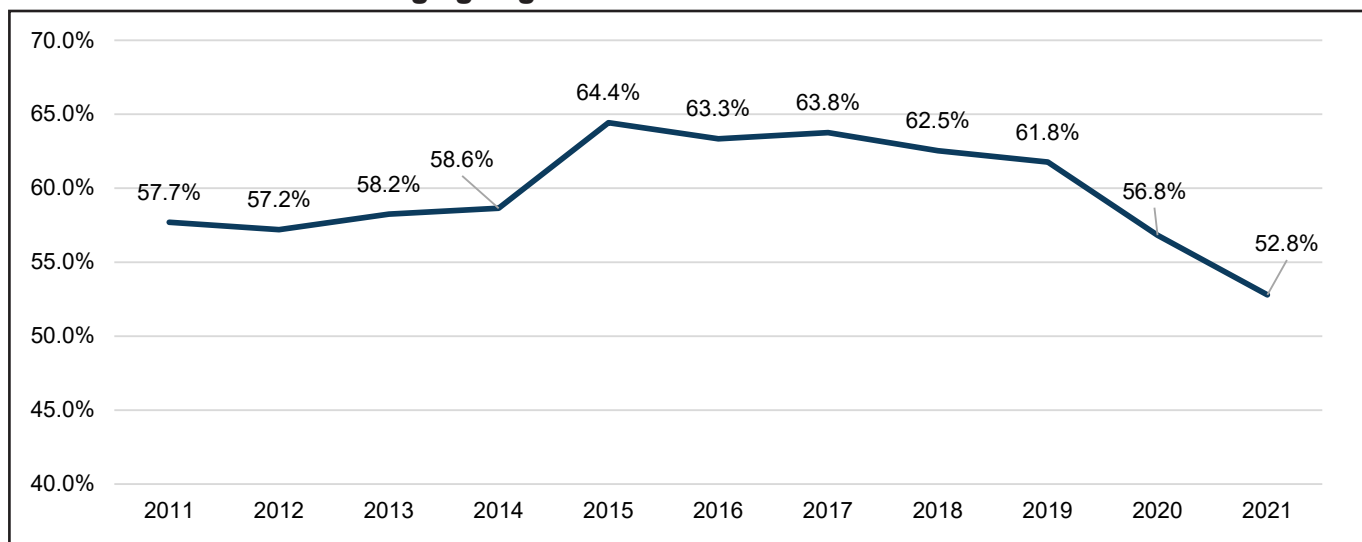
Note: The 2022 college-going rate of 54.3 percent was omitted from the chart to remain consistent with this evaluation's time frame.
Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission, *Tennessee College Going & the Class of 2022: Continuing Momentum*, https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/college-going-reports/CGR%20Report%20Class%20of%202022_FINAL.pdf.

Even though the rate has decreased, Promise students contribute significantly to the statewide college-going rate. Since 2015, cohorts 1 through 5 have made up an estimated 26.1 percent of all high school graduates and 43 percent of all college-going high school graduates in Tennessee.

Exhibit 2.6: Promise students as percentages of public high school graduates and of postsecondary enrollees
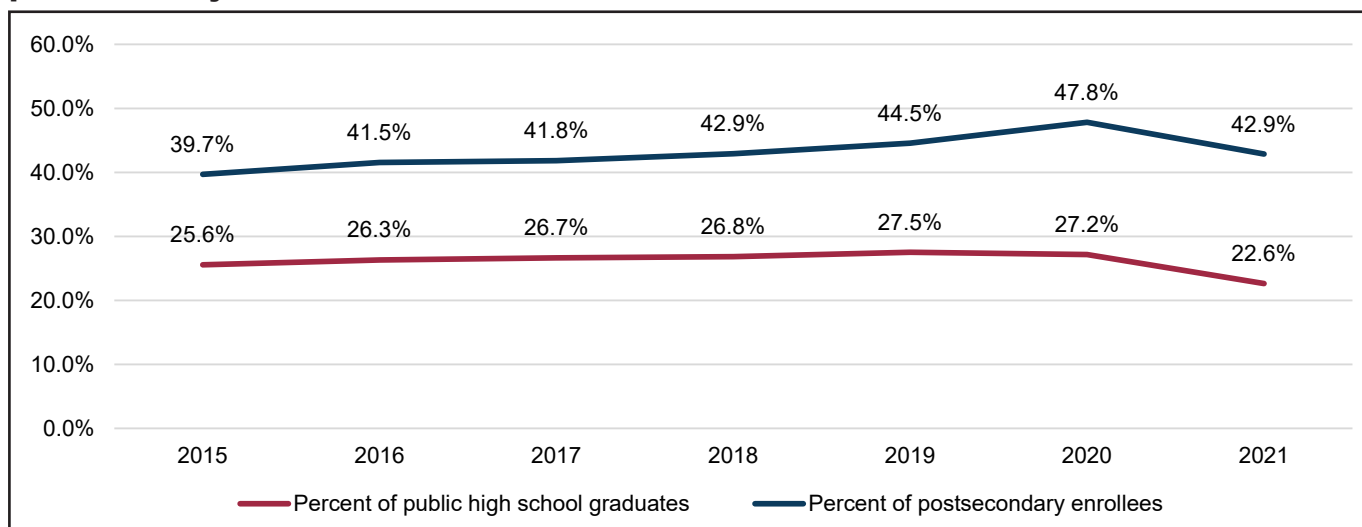
Source: Estimation based on THEC 2021 College Going Report and OREA analysis of THEC data.

Students who apply but do not become Promise students

OREA identified 22,668 students who applied for Promise and enrolled at an eligible institution the fall semester of their cohort year but did not become Promise students because they did not fulfill one or more of the application requirements.[O] These students likely received the requirement reminders from mentors and partnering organizations prior to enrollment. Once enrolled, students may not have received advisement from institution-based staff that Promise students received (to stay continuously enrolled as full-time students, to file their FAFSA, etc.). Throughout the evaluation, OREA used this group of students as a comparison group for students that enrolled as Promise students.

[O] See pages 8 and 9 for more information on application requirements.

While demographic information on non-Promise students can be found among the report's analyses, in general non-Promise students disproportionately enroll in more urban institutions. There are more non-Promise students at Southwest State Community College (Memphis), Nashville State Community College (Nashville), Volunteer State Community College (Gallatin), Pellissippi State Community College (Knoxville), and Chattanooga State Community College (Chattanooga) together than there are at all other community colleges combined.

Over time, the number of non-Promise students increased between cohorts 1 and 3 (2015–2017), then decreased through cohort 6 (2018–2020) before the number increased again in cohort 7 (2021).

Exhibit 2.7 demonstrates that Promise students on average had slightly higher ACT composite scores than their peers that applied for Promise and enrolled as non-Promise students in the same time frame.

Exhibit 2.7: Promise students have a higher average ACT score than non-Promise students who enroll at similar institutions
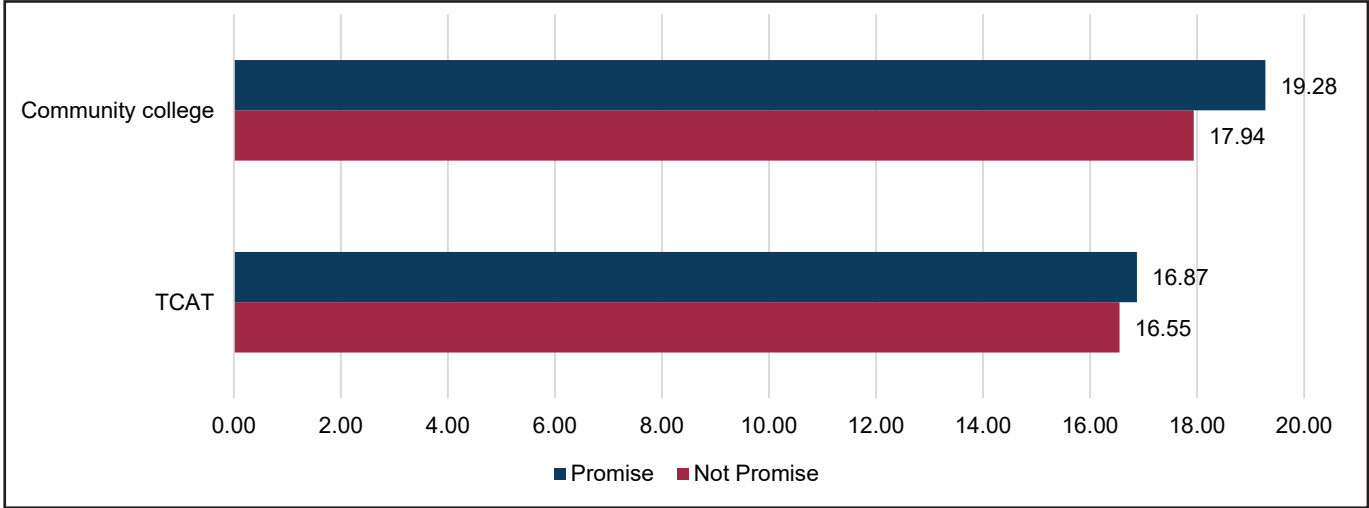
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

The same group comparison shows that proportionally more non-Promise students than Promise students are the first member of their families to attend college.[P]

Exhibit 2.8: A higher percentage of non-Promise students than Promise students are first-generation college students
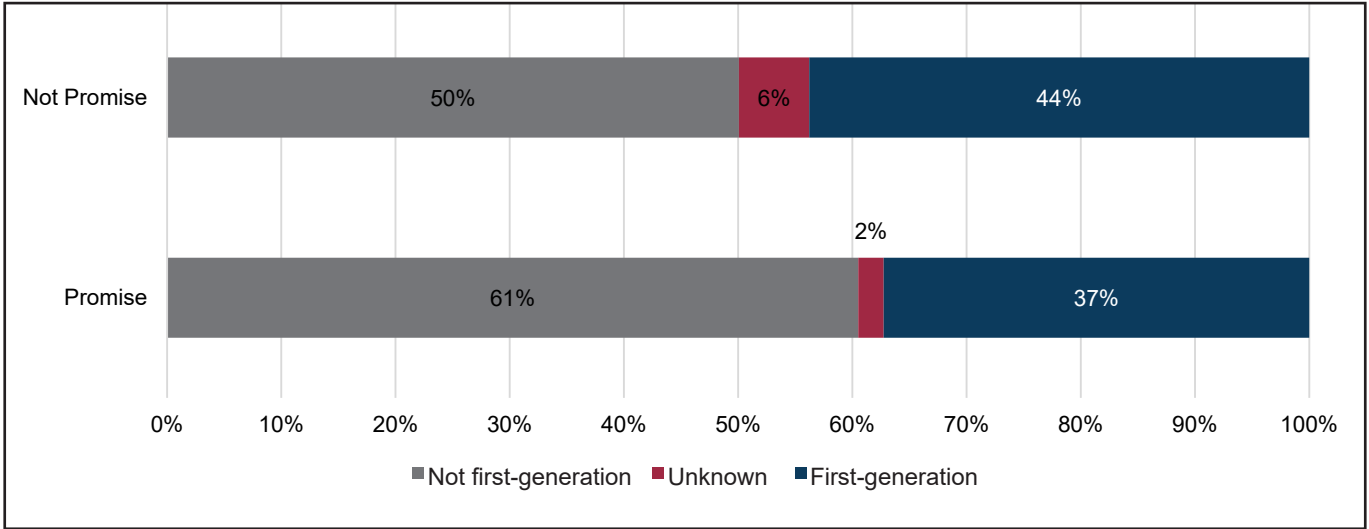
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

[P] First-generation status is identified via the FAFSA, where filers are asked about their parents' highest education level. If either parent has a "college or beyond" education level in any FAFSA filing for any year, the student is not considered first-generation.

Additionally, there are proportionally fewer minority Promise students than there are minority non-Promise students.

Exhibit 2.9: White students make up a greater portion of Promise students than non-Promise students
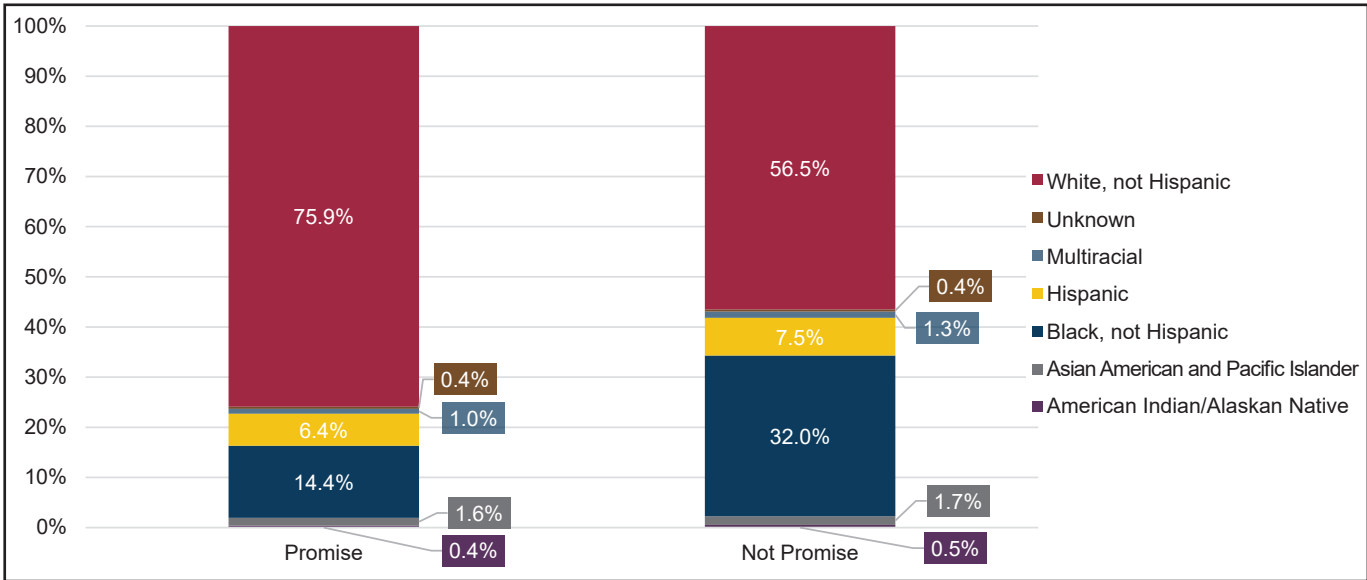
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

The proportion of male and female students is very similar in Promise and non-Promise students. In both categories, female students account for approximately 54 percent of students while males account for approximately 45 percent.

Exhibit 2.10: Promise and non-Promise students have a similar percentage of male and female students
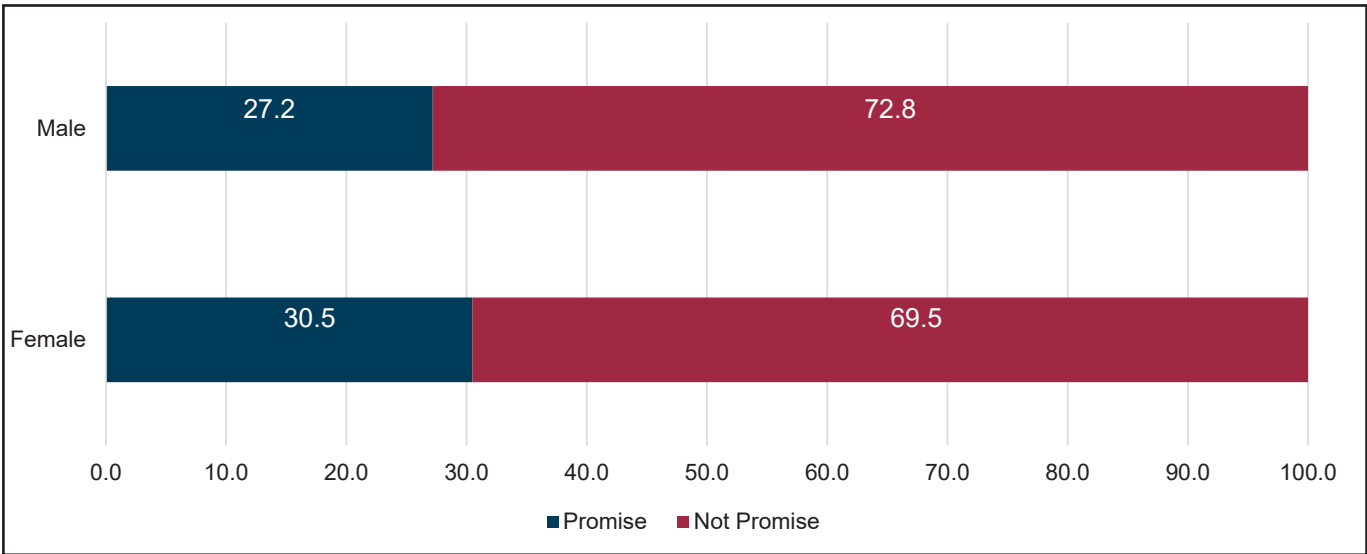
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

The median adjusted gross income (AGI) of students who applied for Promise and attended an eligible institution but not as Promise students resembles the median AGI for Promise students who do not receive money from the Promise fund. While median AGI between cohorts 5-7 for Promise students *increased*, non-Promise students' median AGI *decreased* during the same time frame. Additionally, 80.6 percent (18,270 students) of students that enrolled in an eligible institution not as Promise students were Pell-eligible while 19.4 percent (4,397 students) were not.

Exhibit 2.11: The median adjusted gross income (AGI) of Promise students is higher than that of non-Promise students
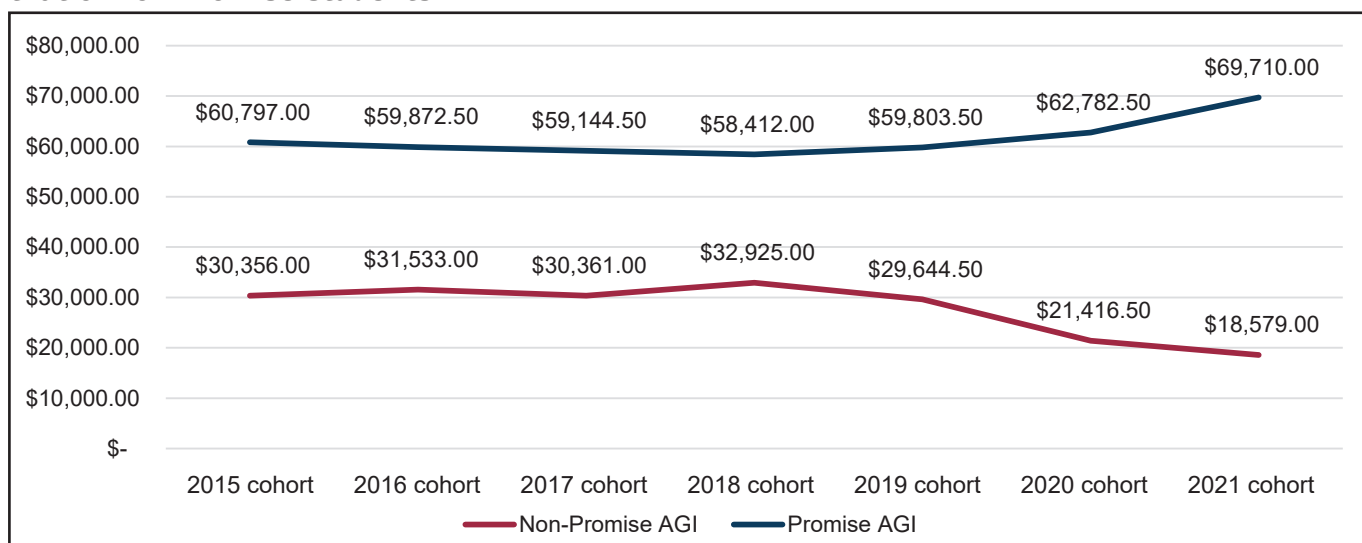
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Across all cohorts, students with an AGI of less than $30,000 make up a smaller portion of Promise students than non-Promise students. Approximately 24 percent of Promise students have an AGI of less than $30,000 compared to nearly 40 percent of non-Promise students. About 36 percent of Promise students have an AGI of over $80,000, whereas approximately 27 percent of non-Promise students have an AGI of over $80,000.

Exhibit 2.12: More non-Promise students have an AGI of less than $30,000 compared to Promise students
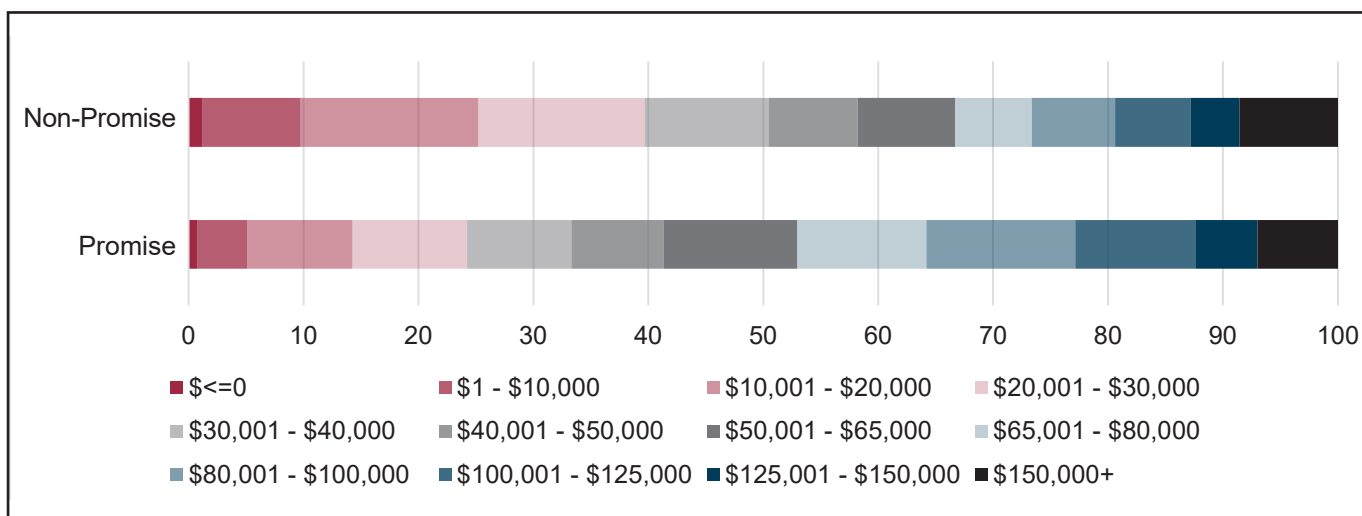
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Enrollment trends by student characteristics

Exhibit 2.13: Promise students who enrolled in fall 2021 have a higher average AGI than previous cohorts
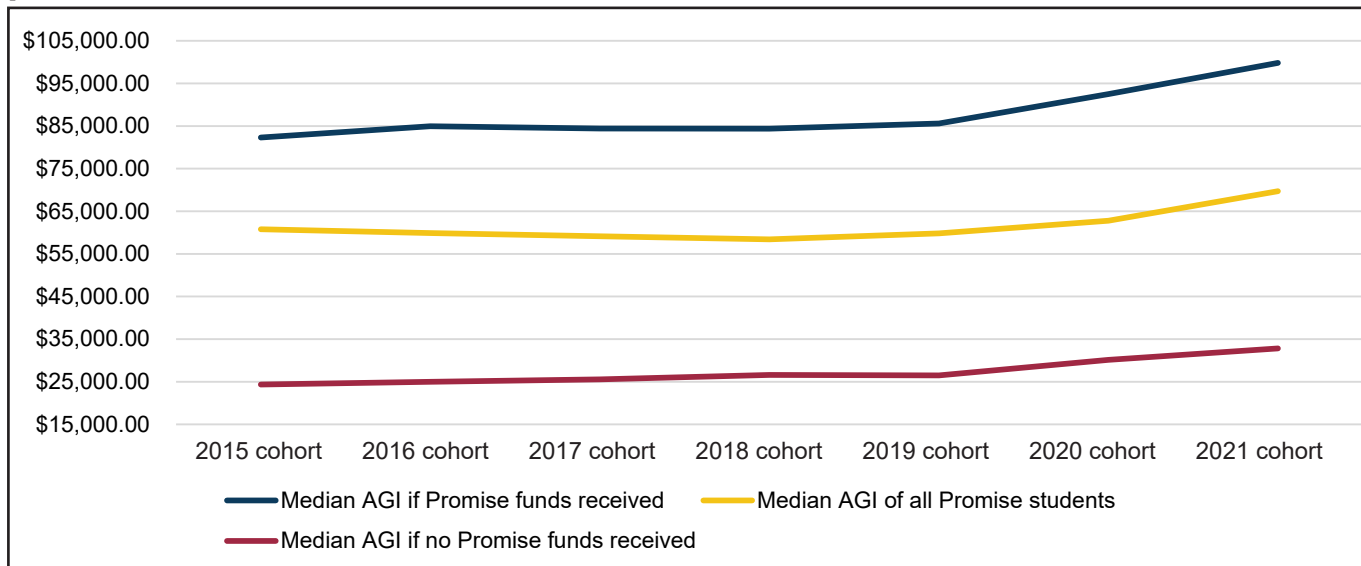
Note: OREA used AGI data from the filing year of each cohort's initial fall enrollment semester and an indicator of Promise payments throughout their collegiate experience. If a student received a non-zero payment at any point, they are counted in the receipt of funds category.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

In Exhibit 2.13, students who received a non-zero payment at any point are in the blue category. The yellow category includes all Promise students regardless of payment status, and the red category includes only students who received zero-dollar payments. Of students that received zero-dollar payments, 97 percent were Pell eligible. Of students that received Promise payments, only 34 percent were eligible for Pell. Since a Pell grant can cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at most Promise-eligible institutions, the discrepancy between receipt of Promise funds and median AGI demonstrates the Promise scholarship's last-dollar design.

The progression of students through different stages of Promise was also analyzed by racial group. White students make up the largest group of Promise applicants, with 65 percent of all Promise applicants identifying themselves as White, not Hispanic. Students who identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native comprise the smallest group of Promise applicants, accounting for less than 1 percent of total applicants. Multiracial Promise applicants complete a FAFSA form on time at the highest rate of all racial groups at 96 percent and complete mandatory meetings and community service on time at the highest rates at 75 percent and 60 percent respectively.

Multiracial Promise applicants also enroll at an eligible institution at the highest rate of the racial groups at 38 percent. Black, non-Hispanic students enroll at the lowest rate (19 percent), followed by American Indian and Alaskan Native students (19 percent) and Asian and Pacific Islander students (22 percent). Multiracial students also have the highest rate (22 percent) of applicants who become Promise students and do not receive Promise dollars. All other racial groups, with the exception of students listed as Unknown, end up receiving no Promise payouts at similar rates, varying between 10 percent and 17 percent.

Exhibit 2.14: A higher percent of White and multiracial Promise applicants become Promise students than in other racial groups

	Applied	FAFSA		Mandatory meeting		Community service		Enrolled cohort		Paid zero enrolled	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2,357	1,795	76%	1,292	55%	1,016	43%	447	19%	242	10%
Asian American and Pacific Islander	8,043	7,282	91%	4,892	61%	3,843	48%	1,793	22%	911	11%
Black, not hispanic	91,515	77,077	84%	58,240	64%	42,640	47%	16,529	18%	11,471	13%
Hispanic	28,001	22,904	82%	17,886	64%	14,677	52%	7,329	26%	4,785	17%
Multiracial	2,978	2,863	96%	2,222	75%	1,801	60%	1,136	38%	667	22%
Unknown	17,350	12,061	70%	7,642	44%	4,901	28%	469	3%	247	1%
White, not hispanic	279,590	244,998	88%	185,536	66%	151,153	54%	87,256	31%	35,727	13%

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Where do Promise students of various demographic groups enroll?

Gender

Approximately 4.5 percent of female Promise students enroll in a TCAT, much lower than the nearly 17 percent of male Promise students who enroll in a TCAT. In turn, more female students enroll in community colleges, locally governed institutions (LGIs),^{Q} or non-state/private institutions.

Exhibit 2.15: Male and female students mostly enroll at community colleges, but more male students enroll at a TCAT
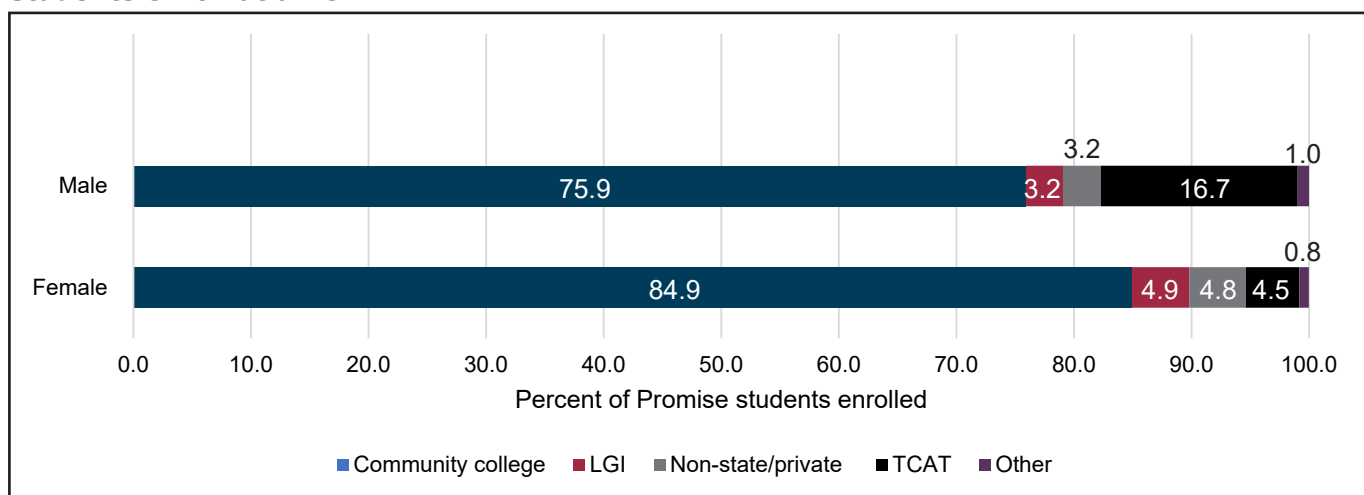
Note: Percent totals may not add up to 100 due to exclusion of students enrolled in the University of Tennessee system.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

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^{Q} Six four-year institutions in Tennessee are locally governed institutions, each with their own governing board of trustees. The institutions are Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and the University of Memphis. Promise students can enroll in two locally governed institutions (APSU and TSU) but only in an associate degree program.

Racial group

TCATs have the highest concentration of White Promise students of the Promise-eligible systems at 85 percent, followed by community colleges (76 percent) and private institutions (75 percent).[R] LGIs have the lowest concentration of White Promise students (54 percent) and the highest concentration of Black Promise students (34 percent) of the eligible systems. TCATs have the lowest concentration of enrolled students out of the eligible systems in all racial groups but White students, including zero enrolled Promise students who identify as multiracial.

Exhibit 2.16: TCATs and community colleges have more White students than non-state/ private schools or locally governed institutions (LGIs)
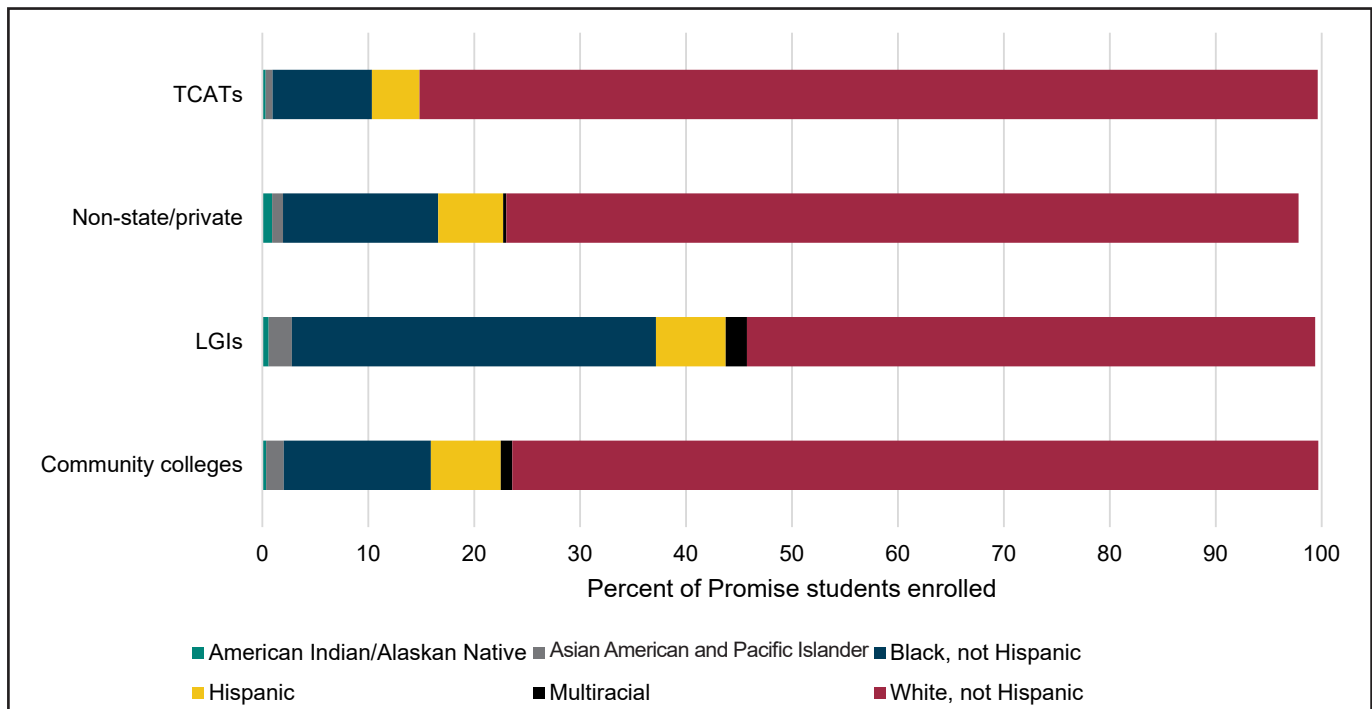
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

ACT score

Students who score lower on the ACT enrolled at TCATs at a higher rate than students with higher scores. Students who score higher on the ACT enrolled at LGIs and non-state or private institutions at a higher rate than students with lower scores. Students who scored in the teens on the ACT enrolled at TCATs at a higher rate than students with a score greater than 21.

[R] Totals may not add up to 100 percent because students with "Unknown" as race were excluded from this exhibit. The UT System is also excluded due to low n-count.

Exhibit 2.17: Promise students with lower ACT scores enroll at TCATs at a higher rate than students with higher ACT scores
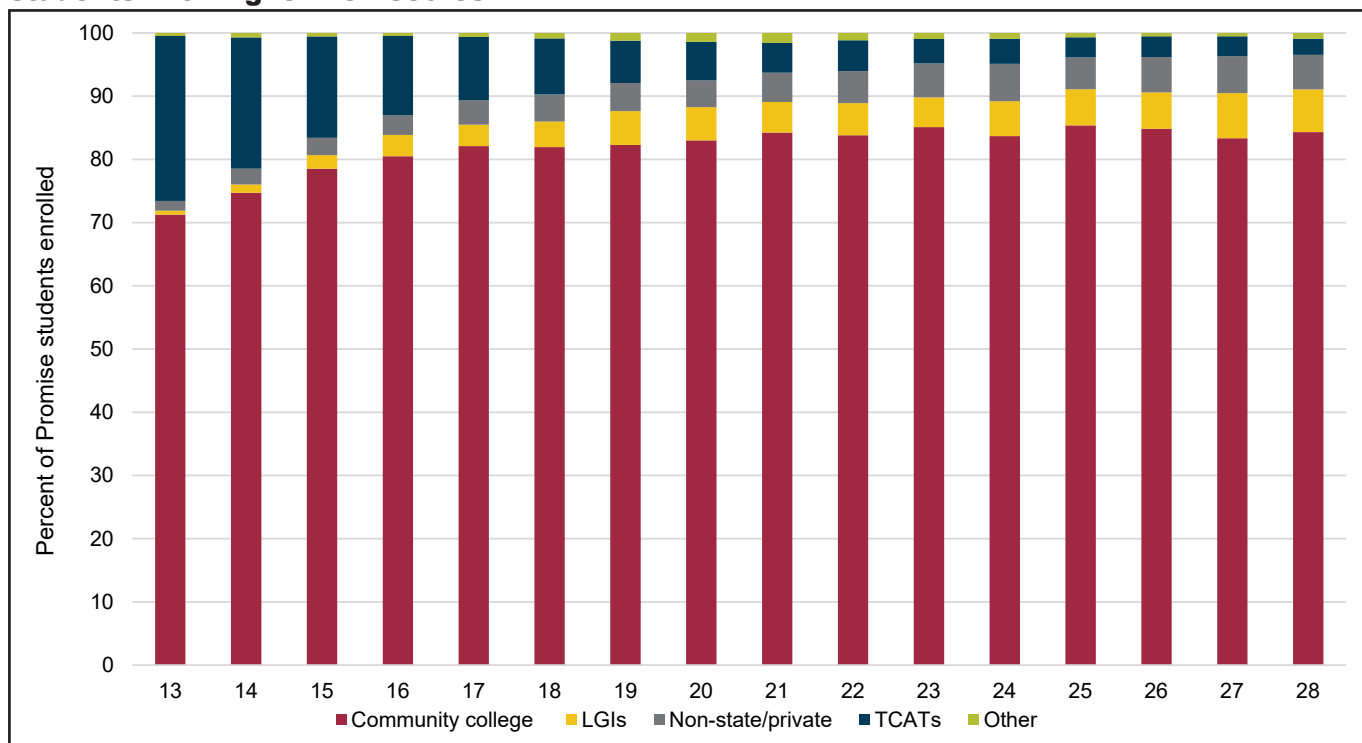
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Missed application requirements

The primary reason a student loses Promise eligibility varies depending on the source. To determine why students that applied for Promise enrolled at an eligible institution without becoming Promise students, OREA looked at data on the three major eligibility requirements from the Financial Aid System of Tennessee (FAST), formerly entitled e*GRandS.

Exhibit 2.18: Promise applicants most commonly do not become Promise students due to missing the community service requirement
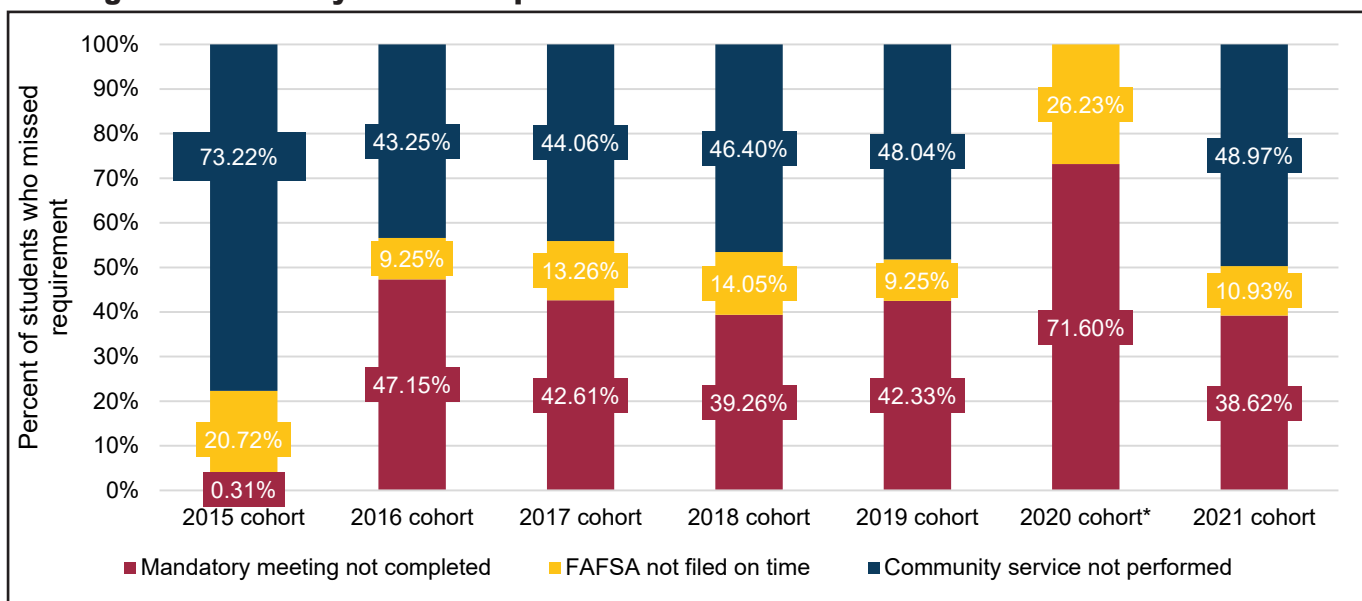
Notes: (1) This exhibit captures only Promise applicants who enrolled at a Promise eligible institution. (2) Cohort 6 did not have the community service requirement. (3) Totals do not all add up to 100 percent because OREA omitted less common reasons like residential status, citizenship status, and missing FAFSA fields.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

For a brief explanation of the community service requirement for Promise students, see "Requirements for Promise applicants" on page 8. Excluding cohort 6, for which the community service requirement was waived, 50.66 percent of potential Promise students lost their eligibility between application and enrollment because of missing the community service requirement, 35.05 percent because of not attending their mandatory meeting with a partnering organization, and 12.91 percent because of not filing the FAFSA on time. The share of students who miss their mandatory meeting has steadily declined since 2016, perhaps due to most mandatory meetings now being held during school hours.

Section 3: Retention

Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	Section 4
		Complete application requirements	Enroll	Complete first year	Complete 5 semesters
How Tennessee Promise works	Cohort 1	Fall 2014 - Summer 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2017
	Cohort 2	Fall 2015 - Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2018
	Cohort 3	Fall 2016 - Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2019
	Cohort 4	Fall 2017 - Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2020
	Cohort 5	Fall 2018 - Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2021
	Cohort 6	Fall 2019 - Summer 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
	Cohort 7	Fall 2020 - Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2023
	Cohort 8	Fall 2021 - Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2024
	Cohort 9	Fall 2022 - Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2025

Included in evaluation
Not included in evaluation

Background

This section examines first-year credit accumulation and retention for Promise students in cohorts 1 through 7.

After enrollment, getting students through their first year of college is a crucial first step toward increasing the percentage of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or credential. Simply put, when students accumulate fewer credits each semester, programs of study take longer to complete, and the Promise scholarship is time sensitive in that there is a five-semester limit on eligibility. This section explores trends in credit accumulation and fall-to-fall retention across cohorts.

For each institution type, credit accumulation and fall-to-fall retention was calculated only for students who enrolled in the fall of their cohort year. For credit accumulation, the data includes students who may have dropped out between enrollment and their second fall semester/trimester.

In this section, Promise students' credit accumulation and retention statistics are again compared to those of students who applied for Promise and enrolled at an eligible institution the fall of their cohort year but did not qualify for the scholarship.

Credit accumulation and retention at community colleges

At community colleges, students who complete two full-time semesters earn at least 24 credit hours (12 credit hours or more each semester). On average, just over 46 percent of Promise students earned at least 24 credit hours their first two semesters at a community college. About 13 percent earned zero credit hours, which suggests they did not complete their first semester. Nearly 40.5 percent of Promise students earned some credit hours but less than two semesters' worth.

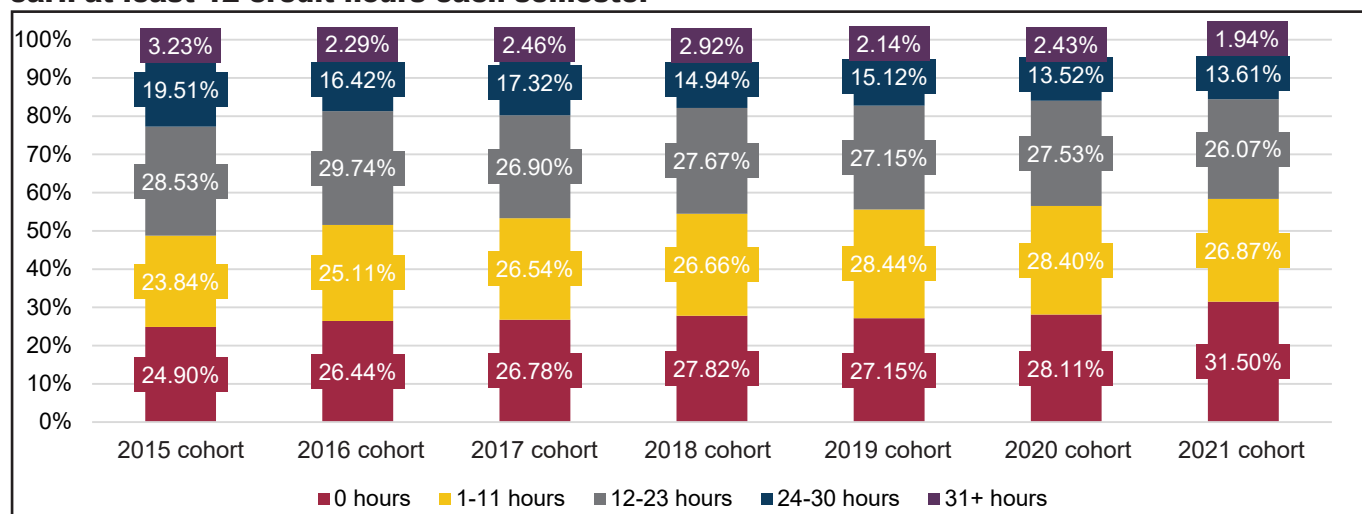**Exhibit 3.1: Most Promise students at community colleges earn at least 12 credit hours each semester**
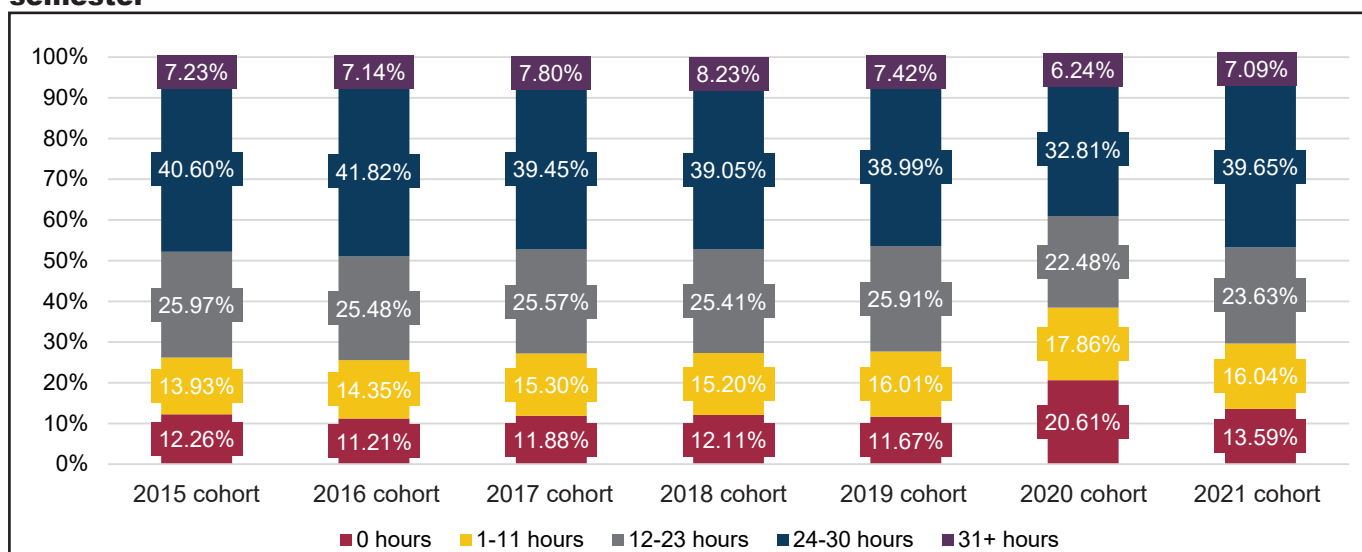
Note: (1) Analysis does not include summer terms. (2) Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
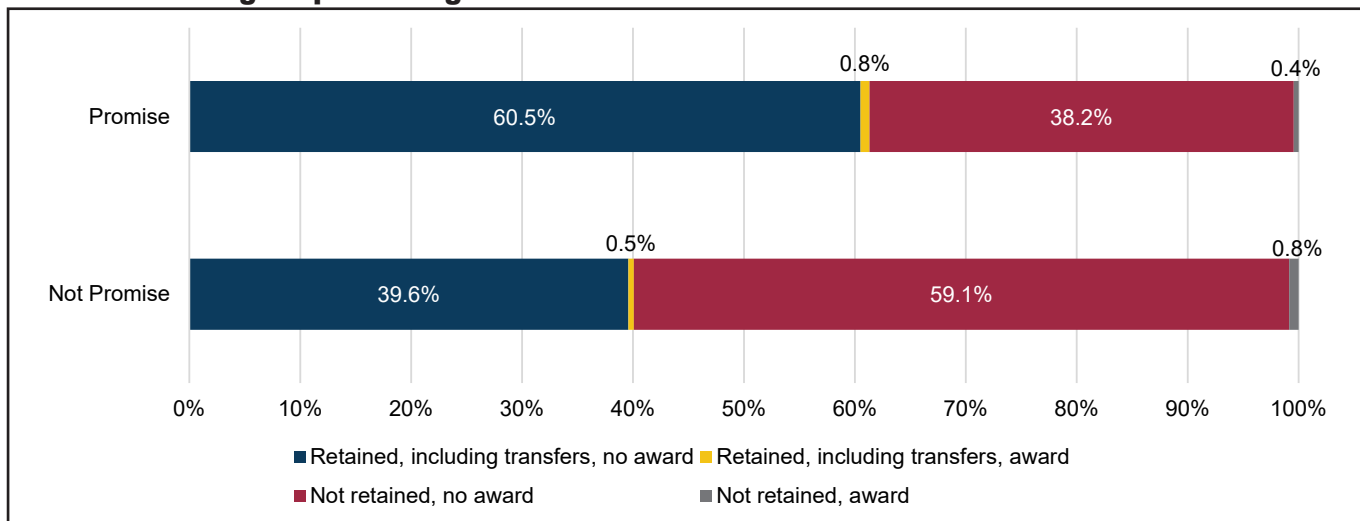Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Note that cohort 6, which enrolled in fall 2020, saw a spike in students earning zero credit hours.

Exhibit 3.2: By comparison, significantly fewer non-Promise students at community colleges earn at least 12 credit hours each semester

Note: (1) Analysis does not include summer terms. (2) Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

It is important to note that non-Promise students are not required to maintain full-time enrollment while Promise students are. The difference in enrollment requirements partially explains the differences in credit accumulation since Promise and non-Promise students do not attempt the same number of credits. Taking Exhibits 3.1 and 3.2 together, it is clear that non-Promise students earned notably fewer credit hours than Promise students during their first year of community college.

To investigate fall-to-fall retention for Promise and non-Promise students, OREA created four retention categories of those who enrolled in the fall of their cohort year:

- students who were retained, including those who transferred to another public school, and did not earn an award within their first year;
- students who were retained, including those who transferred to another public school, and did earn an award within their first year;

41

- students who were not retained, did not transfer, and did not earn an award within their first year; and

- students who were not retained, did not transfer, and did earn an award within their first year, meaning they either completed their program of study or earned a short-term credential.

Exhibit 3.3: A higher percentage of Promise students are retained than non-Promise students

Note: (1) Analysis does not include summer terms. (2) Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Just over 60 percent of Promise students at community colleges were retained after their first year of college without having earned an award compared to 39.6 percent of non-Promise students. Thirty-eight percent of Promise students were not retained and did not earn an award, while 59.1 percent of non-Promise students were not retained and did not earn an award.

Of Promise students that were retained and earned an award, 16.7 percent of the awards earned were associate degrees. The remainder were certificates, which students can earn on the way to an associate degree.

Credit accumulation and retention at TCATs

A full-time TCAT student takes 30 clock hours per week, or 432 clock hours per trimester. Full-time students can miss only a certain number of hours and remain full time. With allowed absences, full-time students earn between 390 and 432 clock hours per trimester.[5] A full year of enrollment for Promise students at TCATs includes fall, spring, and summer trimesters. Thus, the data discussed in this section includes summer trimesters, whereas community college data did not include summer semesters. Considering three trimesters, full-time TCAT students would earn between 1,170 and 1,296 clock hours.

On average, roughly 48 percent of Promise students earn at least 1,170 clock hours their first three trimesters. Many students (about 40 percent) earned at least one trimester's worth of clock hours their first year. TCAT students can earn certificates as they complete individual courses, and some students may have earned fewer clock hours because they earned the necessary certificate for their desired job.

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[5] A TCAT student receives notice of potential suspension when they miss 24 clock hours and is suspended when they miss 42 hours.

Exhibit 3.4: Almost half of Promise students at TCATs earn three full trimesters' worth of clock hours, and about 40 percent earn between one and three trimesters' worth
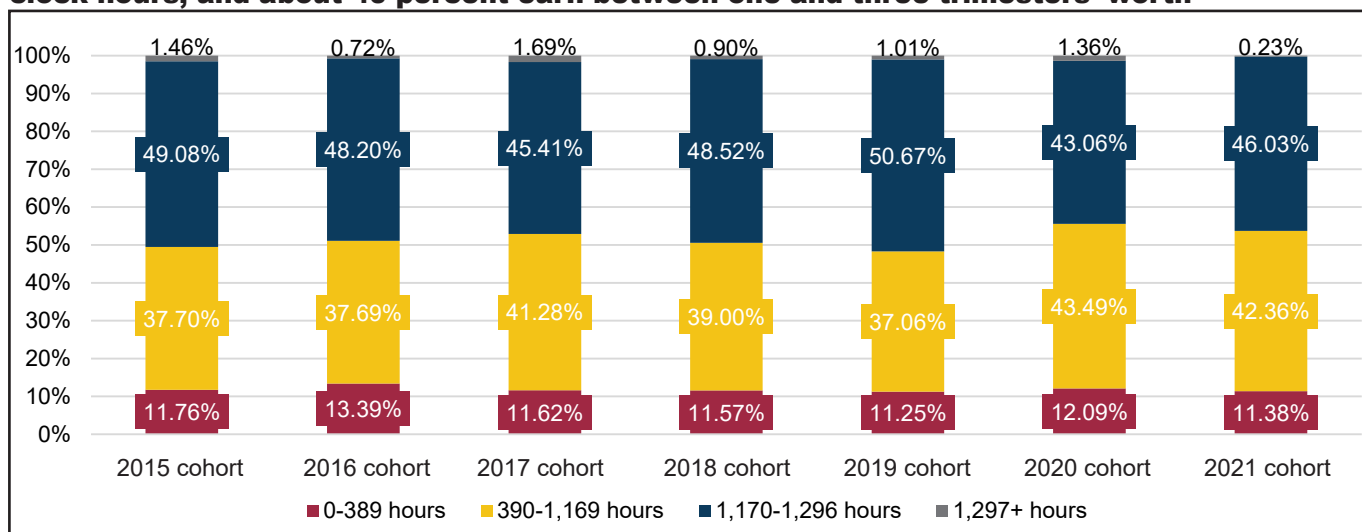

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 3.5: An average of 26 percent of non-Promise students at TCATs earn three trimesters' worth of clock hours, and less than half earn between one and three trimesters' worth
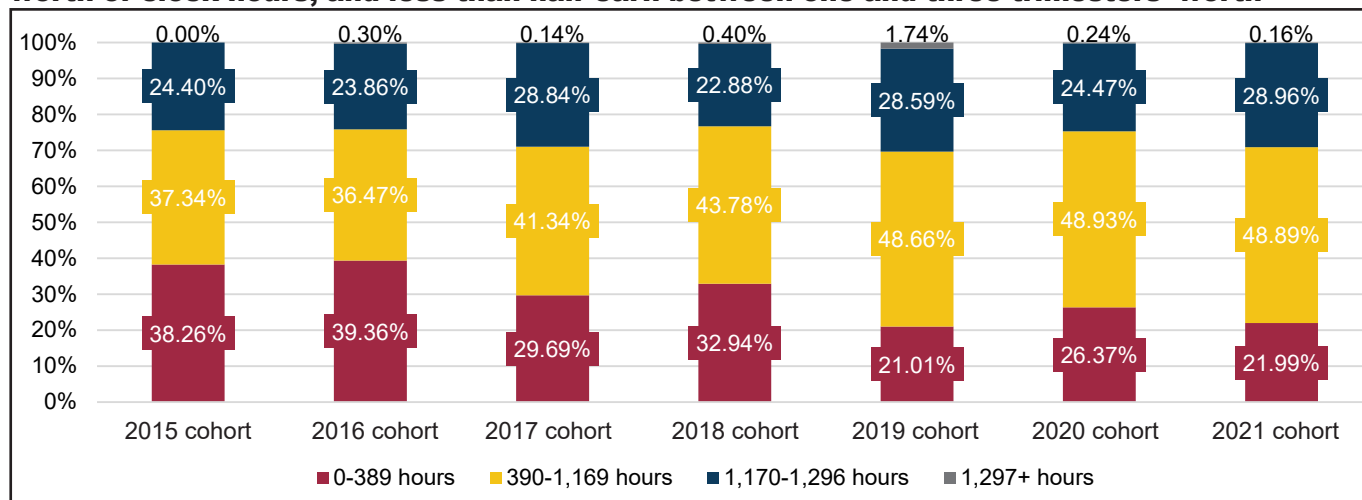
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 3.6: Promise students at TCATs are retained at a higher rate than non-Promise students
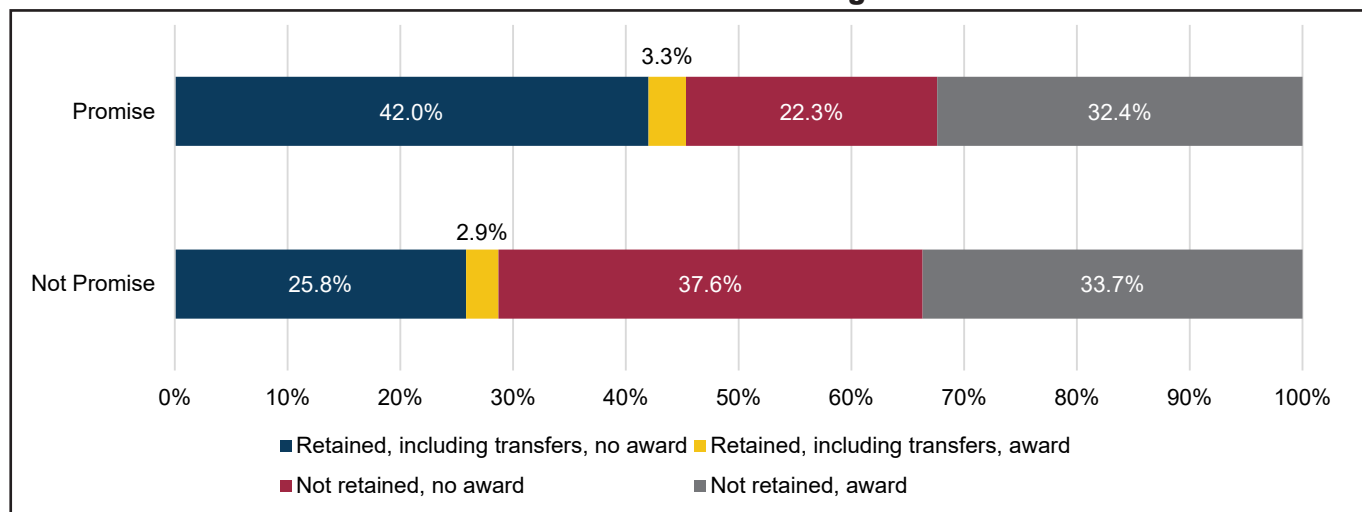
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

At TCATs, 42 percent of students were retained after their first year without an award compared to 25.8 percent of non-Promise students. While similar proportions of Promise and non-Promise students earned an award their first year and did not return (32.4 percent and 33.7 percent respectively), Promise students dropped out at a lower rate than non-Promise students.

Of Promise students that earned an award after their first year and returned the following fall, 57.9 percent earned a certificate and 42.1 percent earned a diploma. Nearly 34 percent of Promise students that earned an award and did not return earned a certificate and 66.1 percent earned a diploma.

Credit accumulation and retention at locally governed institutions (LGIs)

Full-time students at universities who complete their first year earn at least 24 credits. Just over 58 percent of Promise students earned 24 or more credit hours their first year at Austin Peay State University (APSU) and Tennessee State University (TSU).[T] About 35.4 percent earned at least some credit hours but less than two full semesters' worth, and the remaining 6.6 percent earned no credit hours.

**Exhibit 3.7: Credit hours earned in the first year at a Promise-eligible LGI**
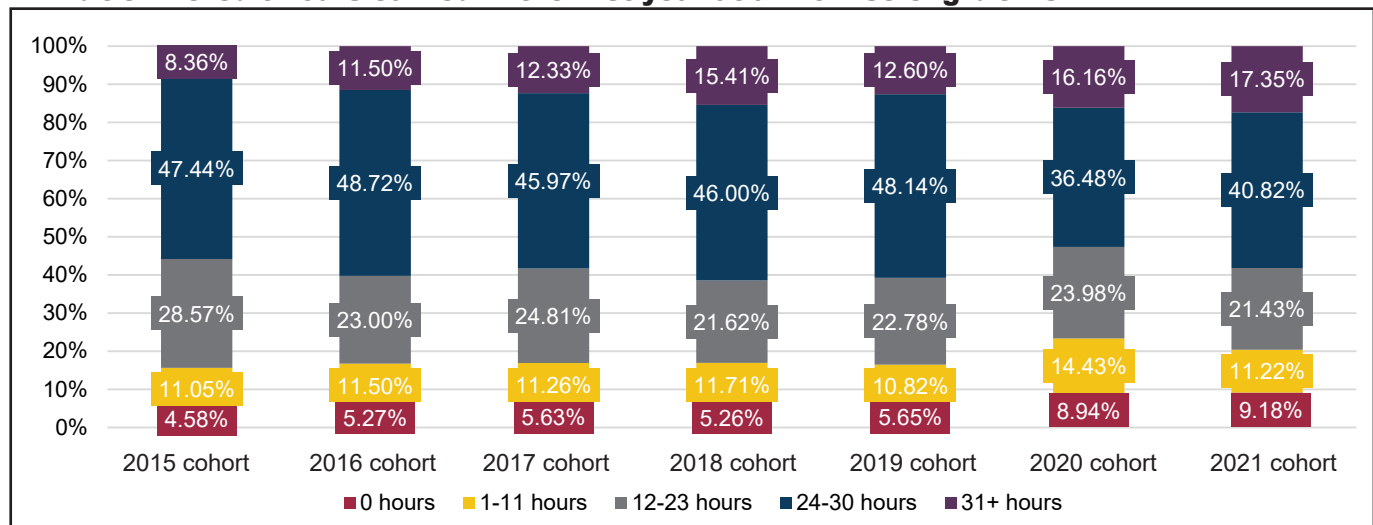
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

OREA did not compare Promise students at LGIs to students who applied for Promise and enrolled at an LGI but did not maintain their eligibility. The latter group of students may have enrolled in an ineligible bachelor's degree program whereas all programs at community colleges and TCATs are Promise-eligible.

[T] Promise students can enroll in two locally governed institutions (APSU and TSU), but only in an associate degree program.

Exhibit 3.8: Fall-to-fall retention for Promise students at LGIs across all cohorts
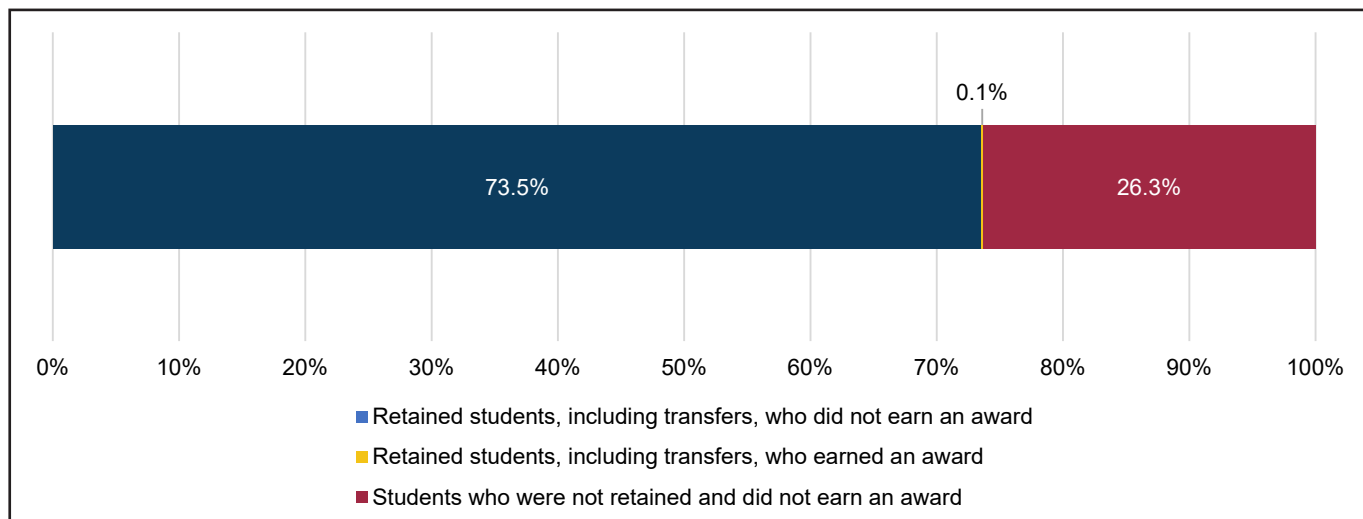
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

At least 8.7 percent of students at LGIs that were not retained and did not earn an award filed a leave of absence or had appeals pending.

Retention by demographic groups

First-generation students

OREA analyzed retention across various demographic groups using the same four categories of retention status as in the analysis of retention of students within eligible systems. Across all cohorts, 54.3 percent of first-generation Promise students were retained without an award from fall to fall. Non-Promise first-generation students were retained without an award at a 40 percent rate.

Non-Promise students are not retained but earn a certificate or credential at a higher rate than Promise students.

Exhibit 3.9: First-generation students who enroll as Promise students are retained at a higher percentage than first-generation students who are not Promise-eligible at enrollment
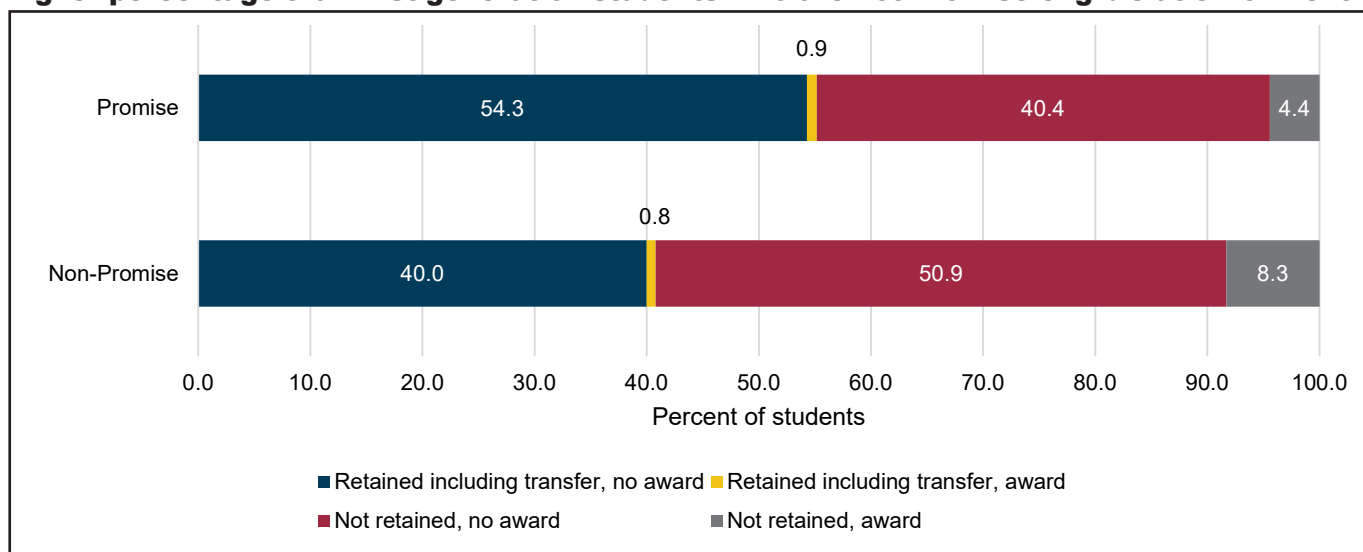
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Gender

More female Promise students, across all cohorts and eligible institutions, are retained with no award throughout their first year of higher education than male Promise students. In each cohort, female students continued to enroll at an eligible institution into their second year without retaining an award at an average of 62.1 percent of the cohort. Male Promise students in the same category amounted to an average of 55.8 percent of their cohort. However, a higher percentage of male students are not retained after receiving an award than female students. In cohorts 1-4 and cohort 6, male and female students are not retained and have not received an award, at similar rates, with 1 to 2 precent more male students falling into this category per cohort than do female students. Female students are not retained without an award at an average of 35.1 percent across all cohorts, while male students are not retained without an award at an average of 37.2 percent across all cohorts. Cohort 5 is an exception to this average, when 5 percent more male students were not retained without an award.
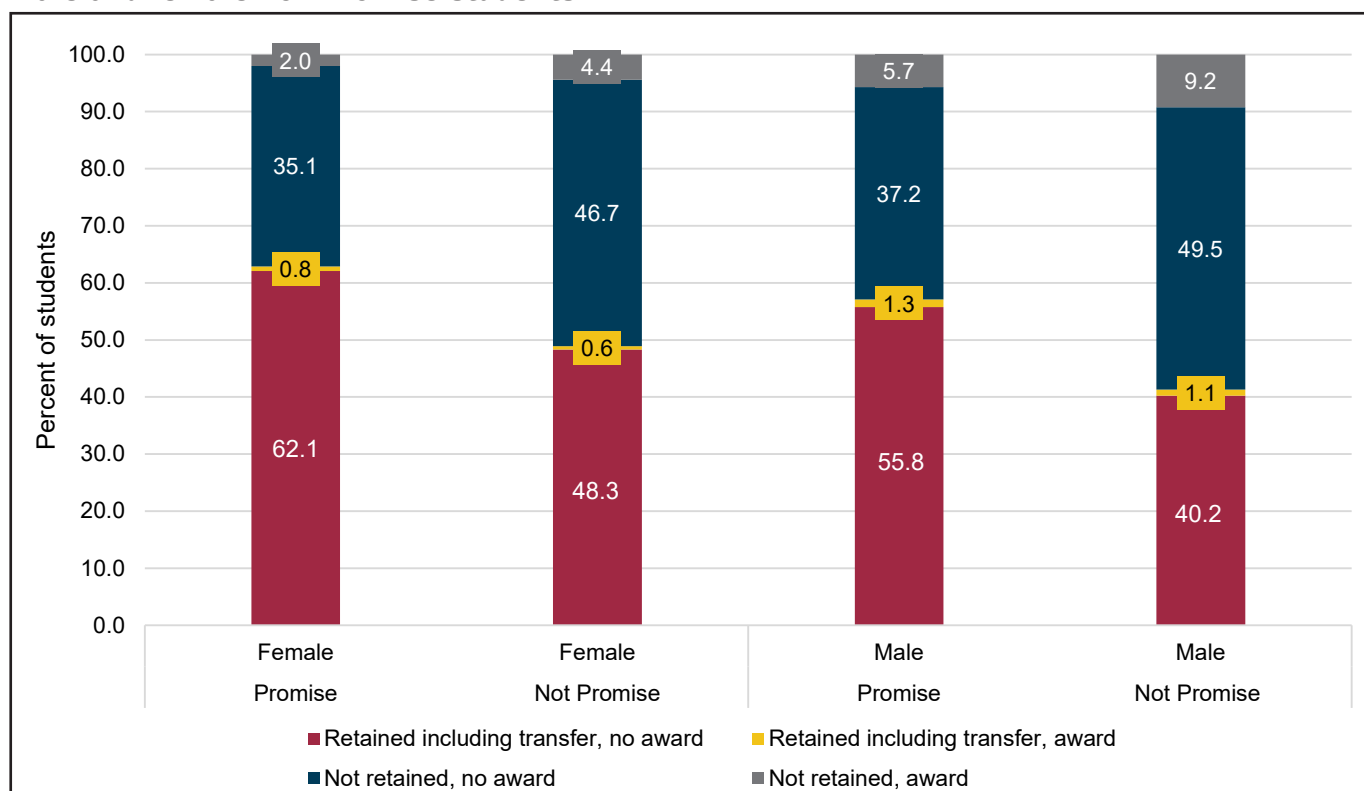
Exhibit 3.10: Across all cohorts, female Promise students are retained at a higher rate than male Promise students

		Retained including transfers, no award	Retained including transfer, award	Not retained, no award	Not retained, award
Cohort 1	Female	62.8%	1.2%	33.8%	2.1%
	Male	58.9%	1.6%	34.3%	5.3%
Cohort 2	Female	65.1%	0.9%	32.0%	2.0%
	Male	58.6%	1.5%	34.8%	5.1%
Cohort 3	Female	61.5%	0.8%	36.0%	1.7%
	Male	55.7%	1.2%	37.9%	5.2%
Cohort 4	Female	62.9%	0.8%	34.4%	2.0%
	Male	56.0%	1.2%	37.2%	5.6%
Cohort 5	Female	63.4%	0.7%	34.1%	1.8%
	Male	54.5%	1.1%	39.1%	5.3%
Cohort 6	Female	57.0%	0.5%	40.2%	2.3%
	Male	51.0%	1.4%	39.9%	7.8%

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

While male Promise students are retained at a lower rate than female Promise students, both groups are retained at greater rates than male and female students who enroll at eligible institutions but are not Promise students. Female Promise students are retained without an award, across all cohorts, at a rate of 62.1 percent. Female students who are not eligible for a Promise scholarship are retained at a rate of 48.3 percent. A similar trend applies to male students. Male Promise students are retained without an award at a rate of 55.8 percent, while male students who are not Promise-eligible are retained at a 40.2 percent rate.

Exhibit 3.11: Male and female Promise students are retained at a greater percentage than male and female non-Promise students


	Retained including transfer, no award	Retained including transfer, award	Not retained, no award	Not retained, award
Female Promise	62.1	0.8	35.1	2.0
Female Not Promise	48.3	0.6	46.7	4.4
Male Promise	55.8	1.3	37.2	5.7
Male Not Promise	40.2	1.1	49.5	9.2

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Racial groups

Within racial groups, Promise students are retained at a higher rate than non-Promise students. White students experience the largest difference between the Promise and non-Promise groups. White students who are eligible for Promise are retained through their first year of higher education at a 59.8 percent rate, while White students who attend an eligible institution but are not Promise-eligible are retained at a 43.7 percent rate, a 16.1 percentage point difference. American Indian/Alaskan Native Promise students are retained at a rate 15.5 percent higher than American Indian/Alaskan Native non-Promise students. Students with the smallest difference in retention rates between Promise and non-Promise are Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, where Promise-eligible students are retained without an award at a rate 9.5 percent higher than non-Promise students. Black students have the second smallest difference in retention rates at 10.6 percent.

Exhibit 3.12: Promise students of all racial groups are retained more than non-Promise students of the same group
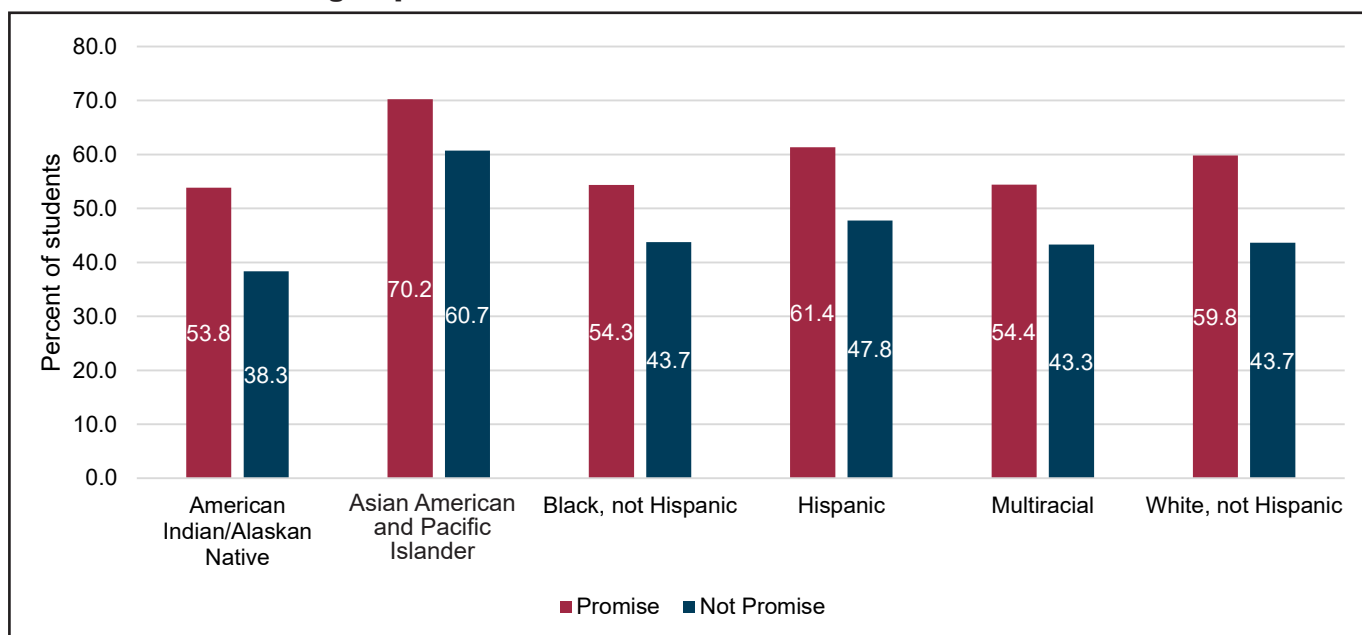
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

In a comparison of retention status of Promise students between racial groups, 70.2 percent of AAPI students are retained without an award and 53.8 percent of American Indian/Alaskan Native students fall into the same category, a 16.4 percent difference. Black students are retained without an award at a rate of 54.3 percent and multiracial students at a rate of 54.4 percent. Hispanic students are retained without an award at the second highest rate, behind only Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

Exhibit 3.13: A greater percentage of Asian American and Pacific Islander students are retained than any other racial group
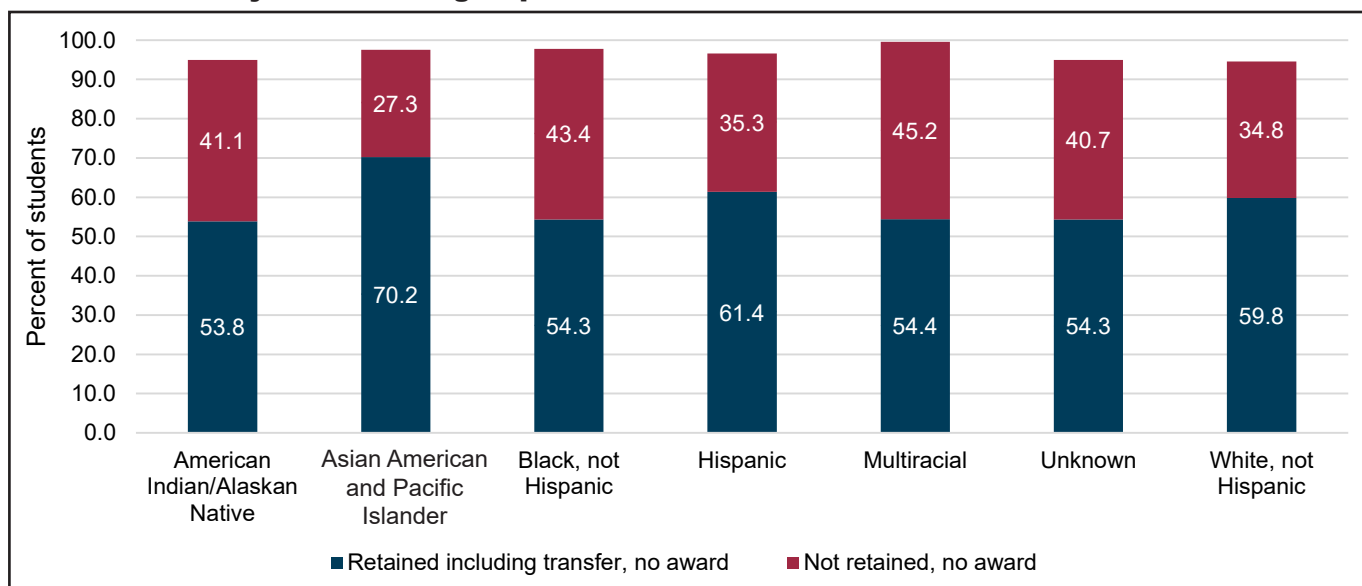
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Note: Percents may not add up to 100 due to exclusion of students in the "Retained including transfer, award" and "Not retained, award" groups.

Adjusted gross income (AGI)

Promise students in all AGI groups are retained at a higher rate than non-Promise within the same AGI group. In other words, a student with an AGI of $40,000 would be more likely to be retained through their first year of postsecondary education than a student with the same AGI who is not Promise-eligible. This holds true for all the AGI groups in the graphic shown in Exhibit 3.14. Despite this, non-Promise students in some higher AGI groups are more likely to be retained than Promise students in some lower AGI groups. Non-Promise students with an AGI of $100,000 or more are retained at a rate between 60.9 and 63.5 percent. Promise students with an AGI below $65,000 are retained at a rate between 52 and 59.8 percent. Students with an AGI of up to $10,000 fall at the bottom of the range, with 52 percent of students in this AGI category retained without an award.

The difference in rates at which Promise students are retained throughout their first year of postsecondary education is higher among students with lower AGIs. Promise students with an AGI of $0 are retained at a rate 19.2 percent higher than non-Promise students with an AGI of $0. Promise students with an AGI of $150,000 or higher are retained at a rate 7.7 percent higher than non-Promise students with an AGI of $150,000 or higher.

Exhibit 3.14: Promise students are retained at a higher rate than non-Promise students for any AGI, but the difference is most pronounced for students with lower AGIs
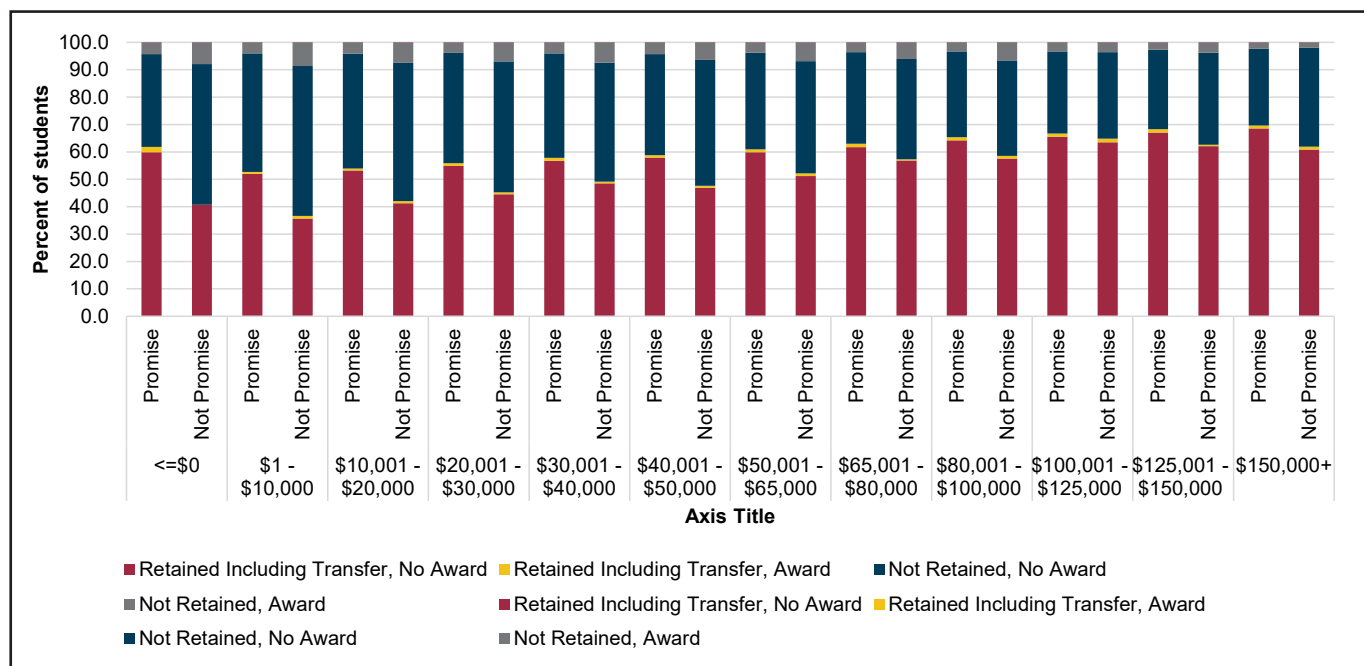
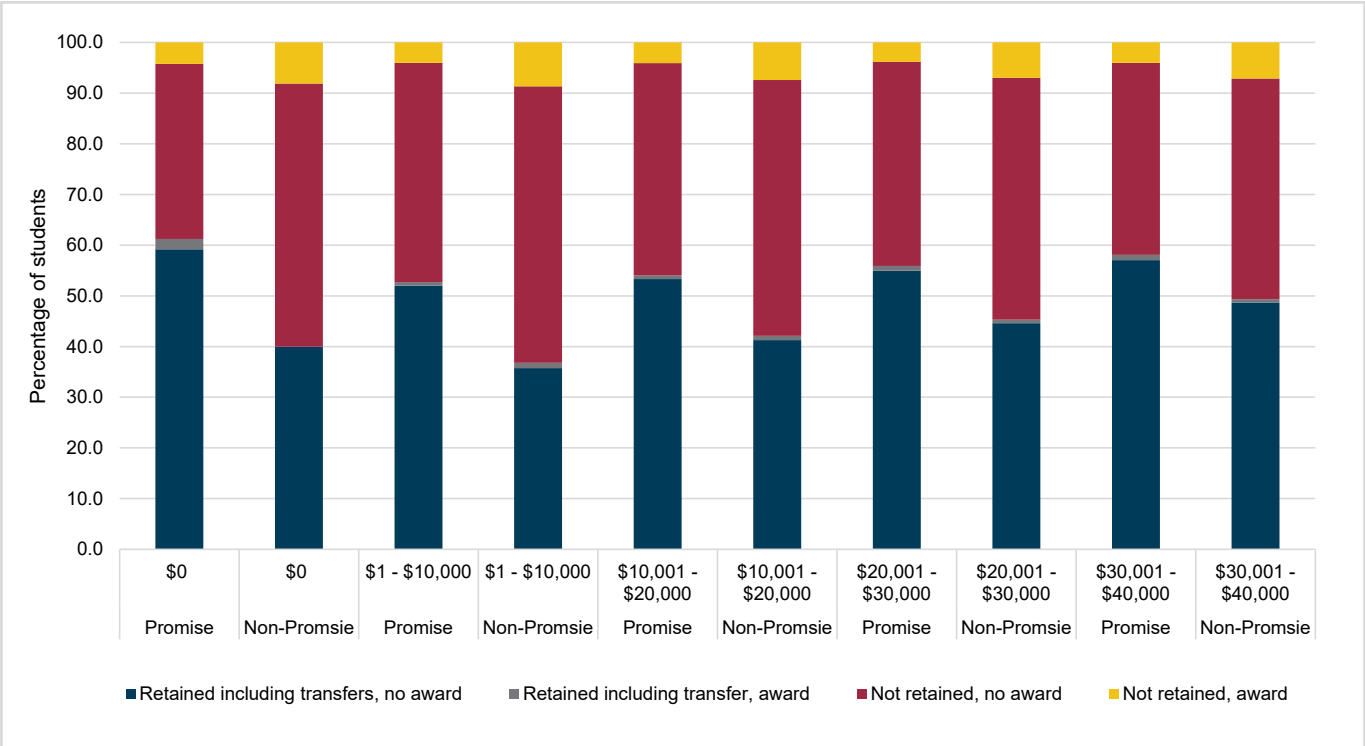Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Students with a low AGI may be eligible for a full or partial federal Pell grant, and therefore, in the instance of receiving full Pell dollars, would receive zero-dollar payments from Promise. However, these students are still required to complete all eligibility requirements to be considered a Promise student. Although these students do not receive Promise dollars, they can still benefit from other aspects of the Promise scholarship program. For example, if a student maintains Promise eligibility but loses Pell eligibility, the student will then receive funds to cover tuition and mandatory fees from Tennessee's Promise scholarship, whereas if a non-Promise student loses Pell eligibility, the student may be required to pay tuition. Students must also be Promise-eligible to apply for a tnAchieves COMPLETE grant, which can be used to pay for books, transportation, or other additional costs.[U]

[U] The tnAchieves COMPLETE grant is available to eligible Tennessee Promise students. The grants serve as additional funding that can cover costs outside of tuition and mandatory fees. See https://tnachieves.org/grants. The Ayers Foundation Trust also administers these grants.

When Pell eligibility is accounted for, Promise students are still retained at a higher rate than non-Promise students. Promise- and Pell-eligible students are retained at a rate of nearly 60 percent, while non-Promise students who are Pell-eligible are retained at a rate just under 40 percent.

Exhibit 3.15: Among students with a low AGI who are Pell-eligible, Promise students are retained at a higher rate

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Section 4: Credential attainment

Section 1		Section 2		Section 3	Section 4
		Complete application requirements	Enroll	Complete first year	Complete 5 semesters
How Tennessee Promise works	Cohort 1	Fall 2014 - Summer 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2017
	Cohort 2	Fall 2015 - Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2018
	Cohort 3	Fall 2016 - Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2019
	Cohort 4	Fall 2017 - Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2020
	Cohort 5	Fall 2018 - Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2021
	Cohort 6	Fall 2019 - Summer 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
	Cohort 7	Fall 2020 - Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2023
	Cohort 8	Fall 2021 - Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2024
	Cohort 9	Fall 2022 - Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2025

Included in evaluation
Not included in evaluation

Tennessee Promise pays tuition and mandatory fees for up to two and a half years of college with a final goal of increasing the state's credential attainment rate. At community colleges and eligible universities, two and a half years equals five college semesters. The chart above displays the final eligible semester for each cohort.[v] At TCATs, Promise students can participate in the program for up to eight trimesters. For students who began at a TCAT in fall 2015, their last trimester was spring 2018.

This section examines credential attainment, the percent of students who earned certificates, degrees, or diplomas for Promise students in cohorts 1 through 6. The examination ends at cohort 6 because, at the time of writing, completion data for cohort 7 (fall 2023) was not yet available. Where cohorts 1 through 5 have data available for all five potential Promise semesters, cohort 6 did not have data available for the fifth semester but was still included.

Promise considers an associate degree at a community college or eligible university and a diploma at a TCAT terminal degrees. If a student earns an associate degree or a technical diploma within the first five semesters or eight trimesters, their eligibility for the Promise scholarship is terminated, unless the student is enrolled in a sequential certificate or diploma program.

With that in mind, OREA first analyzed whether Promise students earned a terminal degree within the allotted time frame and compared that rate to those for students who applied for Promise and enrolled at an eligible institution but did not qualify for the program.

Through surveys and interviews, OREA learned from community college and TCAT employees that some Promise students struggle to complete their program of study within the five allotted semesters. To uncover more about Promise students who earn terminating degrees outside of the five semester limit, OREA investigated awards data for Promise students who would have at least four additional semesters' worth of data after their fifth semester of enrollment at a community college or eighth trimester at a TCAT. Cohorts 1-4 meet those criteria.

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[v] Promise students can enroll in two summer semesters during the standard five-semester time frame, but enrollment in the summer semesters is not required to maintain continuous enrollment. Beginning in the summer 2024 semester, a Promise student can enroll part time and use Promise funds, and the part-time summer semester will not count toward the five semester limit.

Exhibit 4.1: Promise students at TCATs earn an award on time at the highest rate of the Promise-eligible institutions
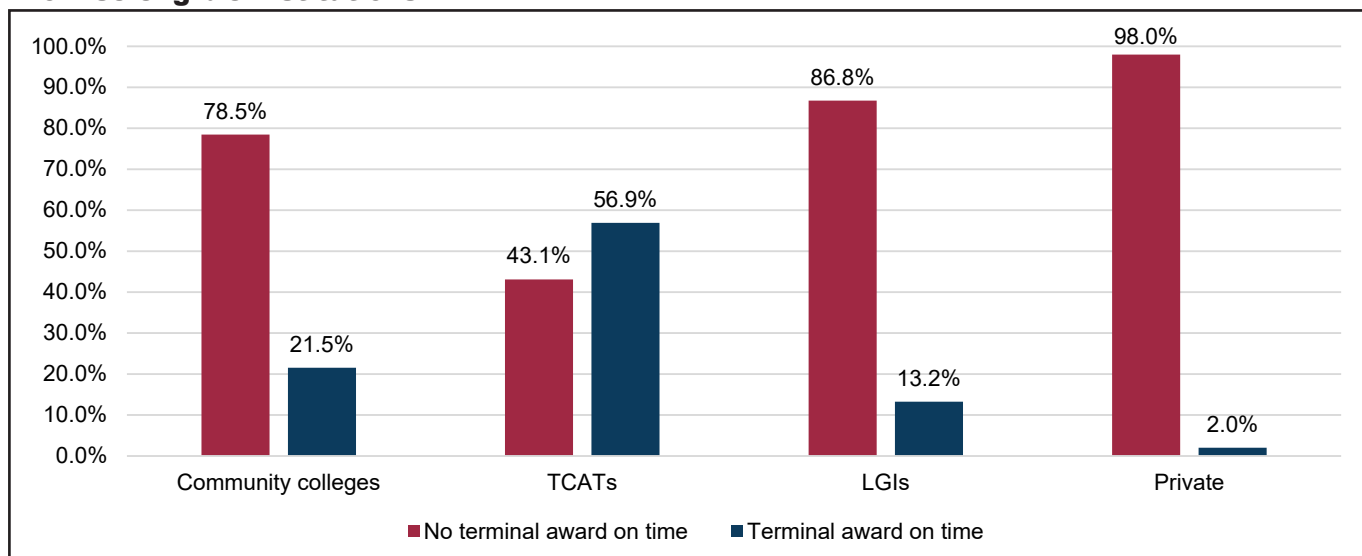

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 4.2: Non-Promise students earn an award on time at lower rates than Promise students
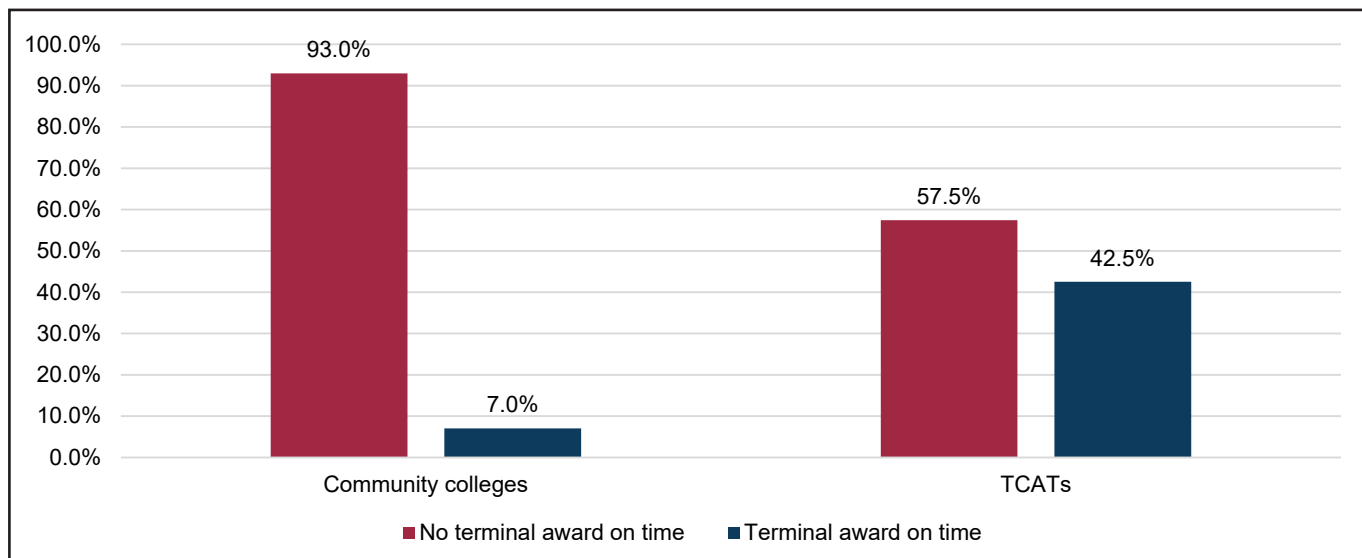
Note: OREA could not compare Promise students to non-Promise students (those who apply and enroll at an eligible institution but do not qualify for receipt of benefits) at LGIs and private colleges because there is no way to distinguish whether a student intended to pursue an eligible program.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 4.3: Community college students who earn a terminating award late most often do so one term after their Promise eligibility has expired
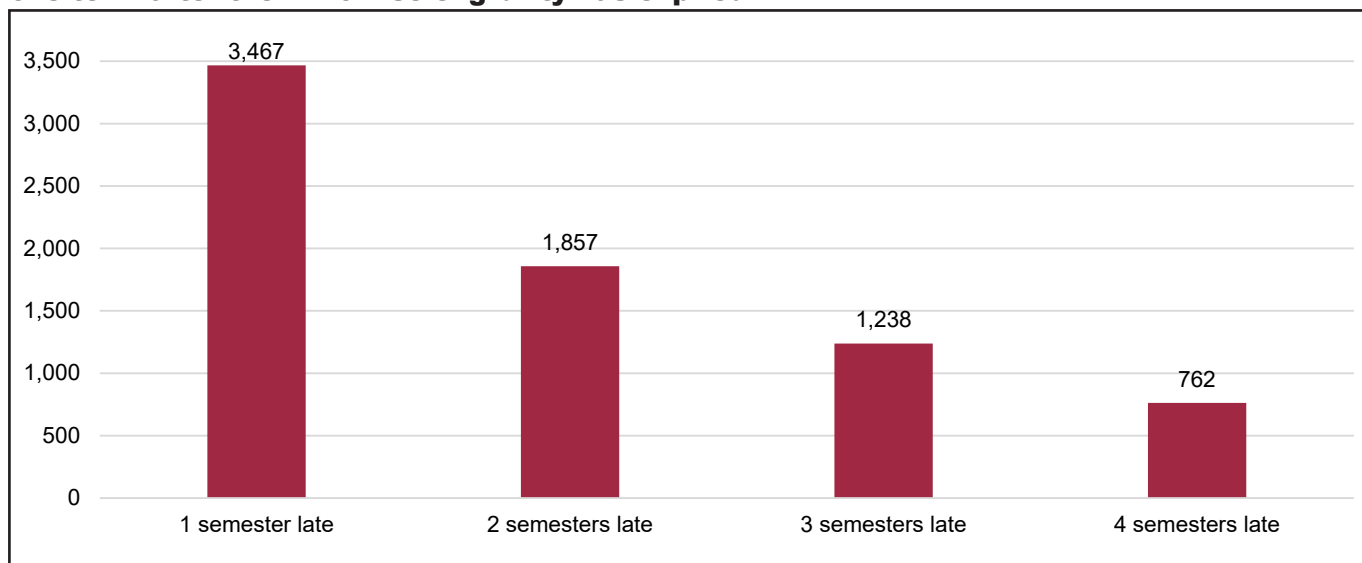
Note: The data includes both associate degrees and technical diplomas to capture students that started at community colleges but transferred to a TCAT. For those students, the first semester they could earn a degree late would have otherwise been their last trimester of eligibility at a TCAT (spring 2018 for cohort 1) since their first semester at a community college still counts as a Promise semester. The data above includes only cohorts 1 through 4.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Students who started their careers at a community college with Promise earned 7,324 terminating degrees after expiration of their five-semester Promise eligibility. Of these students, the 3,467 students that earned an award one semester late represent 6.3 percent of cohorts 1 through 4, and the remaining 3,857 students that earned an award between two and four semesters late represent another 7.1 percent of the same cohorts.

Over 58 percent of late awards were in Liberal Arts and Sciences, but the next two largest categories, comprising over 9 percent of late awards, were nursing related. When OREA discussed late awards with community college employees, nursing came up most frequently in conversation. In cohorts 1-6, 183 Promise students earned a nursing degree within five semesters, whereas in cohorts 1-4 alone 673 Promise students earned a nursing degree outside of the time frame.

Exhibit 4.4: Although Liberal Arts and Sciences is most commonly not completed on time, three healthcare-related degrees are in the top 10 most common awards not completed on time

| Program of study	Number of late awards	Percent total of late awards
Liberal Arts and Sciences	4,286	58.52%
Registered Nursing	420	5.73%
Licensed Practical Nurse Training	253	3.45%
General Business Administration and Management	245	3.35%
Medical Radiologic Technology/Science - Radiology Technician	178	2.43%
Information Technology	155	2.12%
Education	130	1.77%
Engineering Technology	92	1.26%
Communications Technology	90	1.23%
Electromechanical/Electromechanical Engineering Technology/Technician	76	1.04%

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

At both community colleges and TCATs, however, students can earn certificates, which are non-terminating awards (if the student is not enrolled in a sequential certificate program) and count as college credentials in the Drive to 55, on the way to earning degrees and technical diplomas. With this in mind, OREA investigated the number of students who earned any award during the allotted time frame.

Exhibit 4.5: Percentage of Promise students who earned any award within five semesters
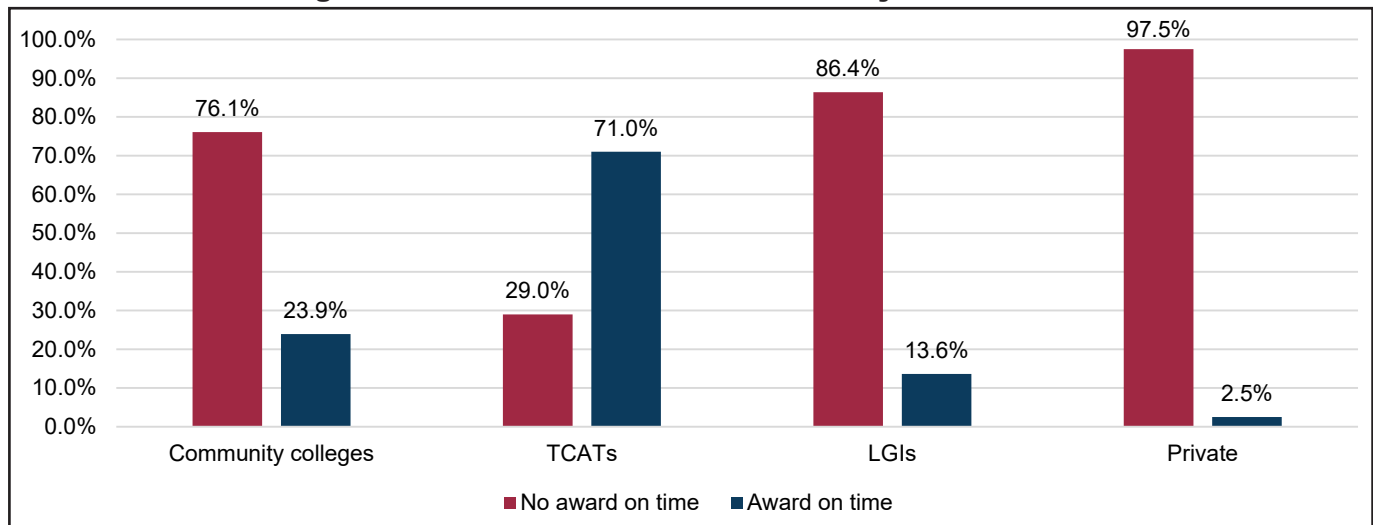
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 4.6: Percentage of non-Promise students who earned any award within five semesters
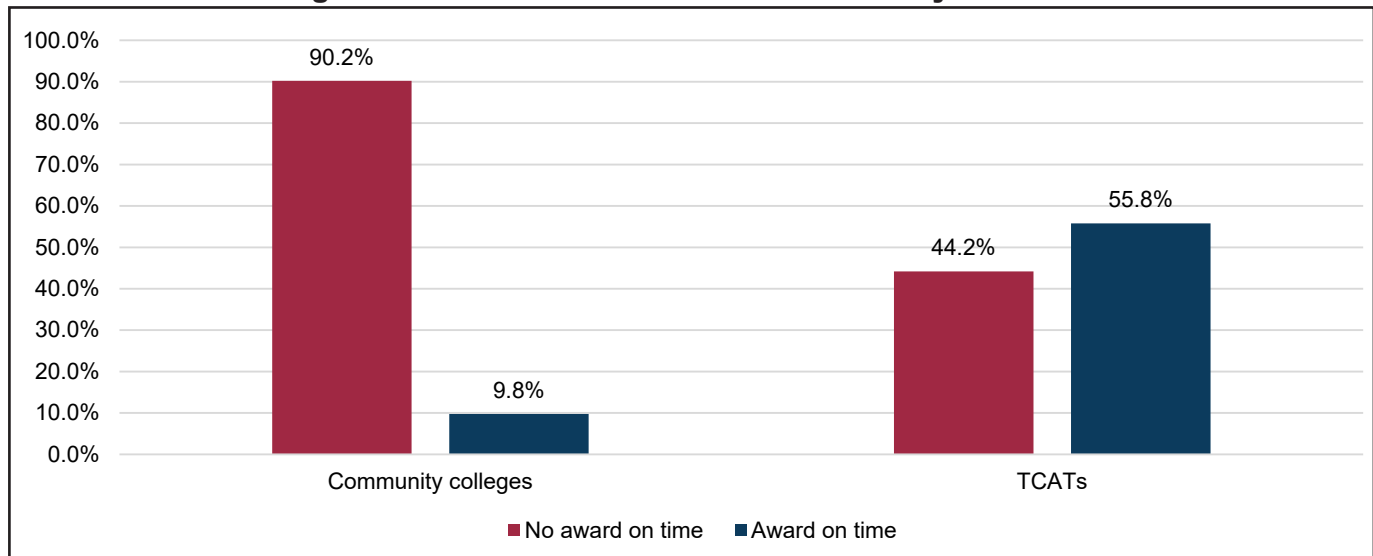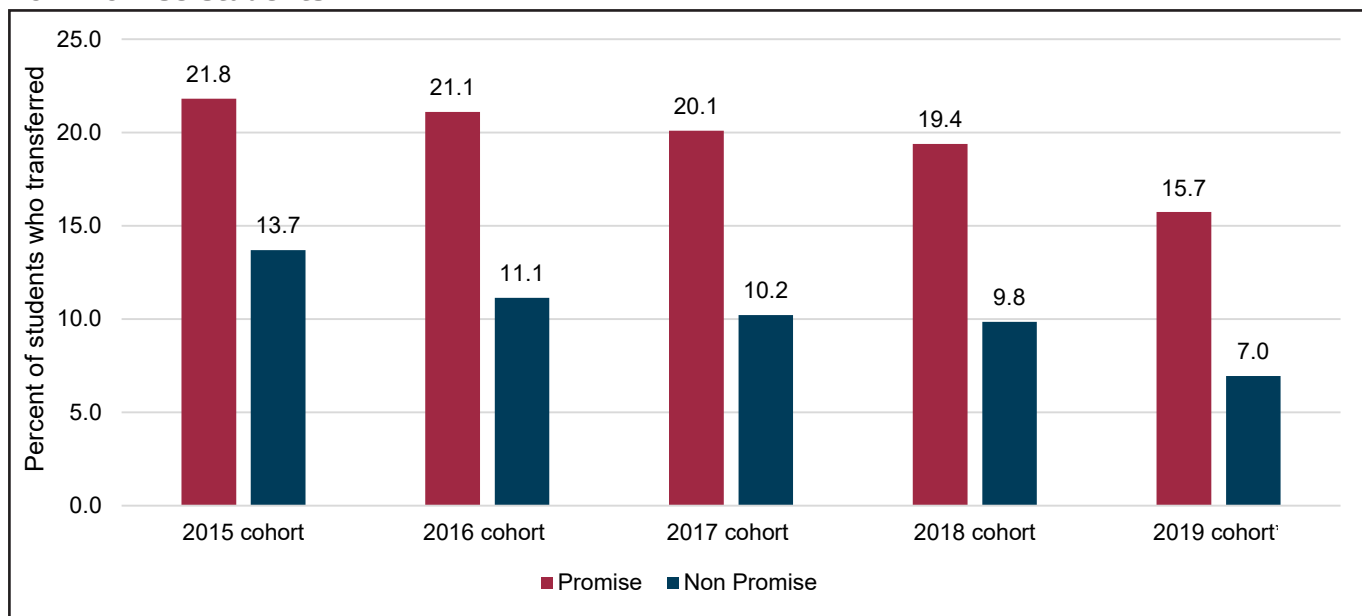

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

A larger proportion of Promise students transferred to a public four-year institution than non-Promise students

About 20 percent of Promise students across cohorts enrolling between 2015 and 2018 at a community college transferred to a public four-year institution. Public four-year institutions include all of Tennessee's locally governed institutions and the University of Tennessee system.[W] Students enrolled at a community college who were not Promise eligible transferred to a public four-year institution at a lower rate of about 10 percent.

[W] This analysis includes the eight terms following the term a cohort initially enrolled. This includes summer terms.

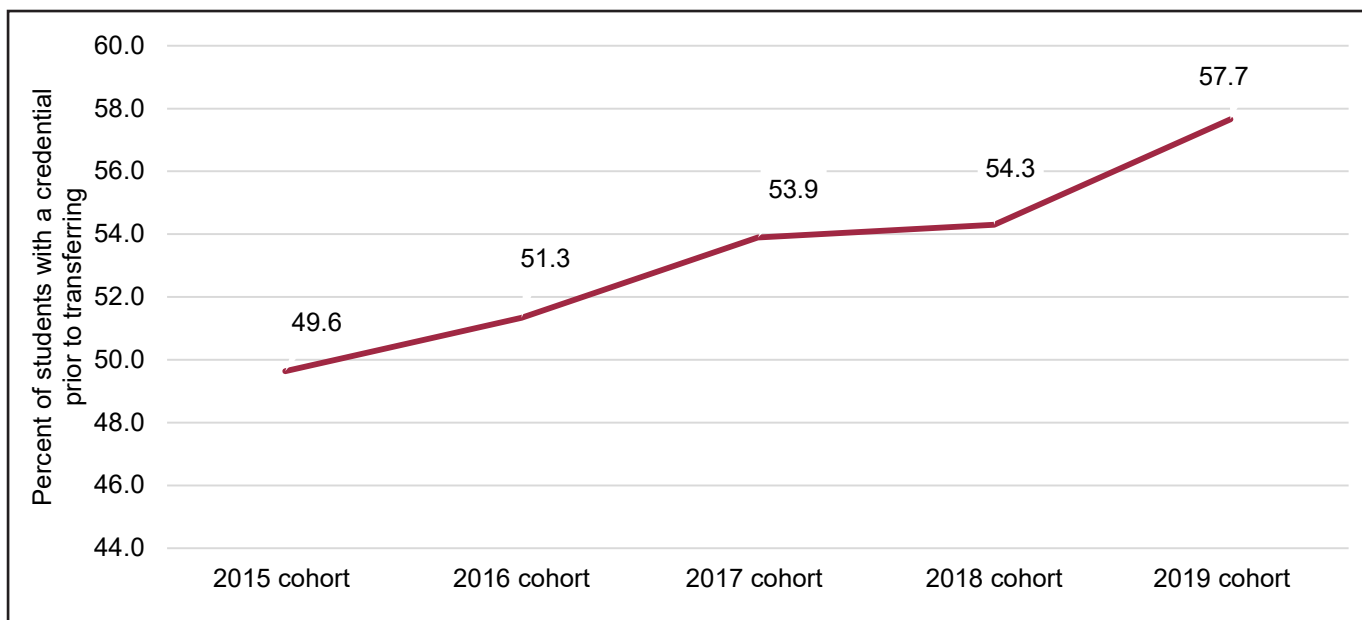**Exhibit 4.7: Promise students transfer to a four-year institution at a higher rate than non-Promise students**

Although the percent of students who transferred decreased between 2015 and 2019, a larger percent of students who transferred earned a credential from a community college prior to enrollment at a four-year institution. The proportion of students who attained a credential prior to transferring has increased with each cohort since the first cohort enrolled in 2015. About 50 percent of students from the 2015 cohort attained a credential from a community college prior to transferring to a four-year institution. Nearly 58 percent of transfer students from the 2019 cohort earned a credential prior to enrollment at a public four-year institution.

Exhibit 4.8: Over half of Promise students earn a credential before transferring to a four-year institution

# Credential attainment across demographic groups

Female Promise students earn a terminating degree or certificate during the eligibility period 25.1 percent of the time, while male students earn an award in the same period 29.4 percent of the time. Slightly over 9 percent of female students earn an award sometime following the five terms in which a student can use Promise, while 7.5 percent of male students earn an award in the same time frame.

Exhibit 4.9: Awards by gender of Promise students
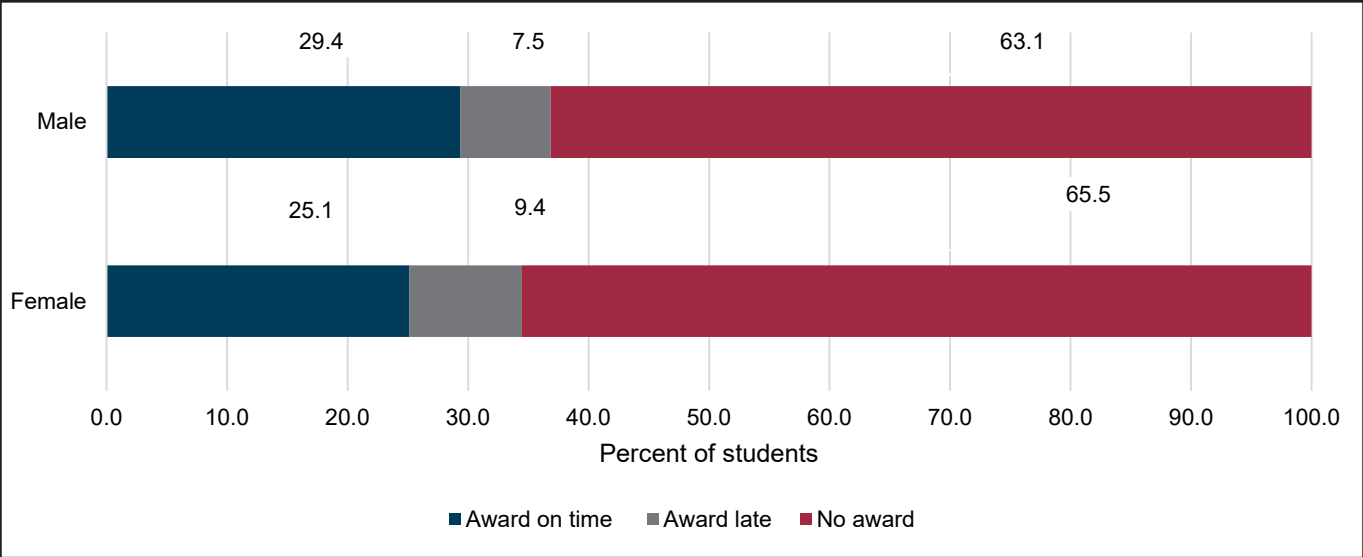
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 4.10: Percent of male and female Promise and non-Promise students receiving an award in five Promise-eligible terms
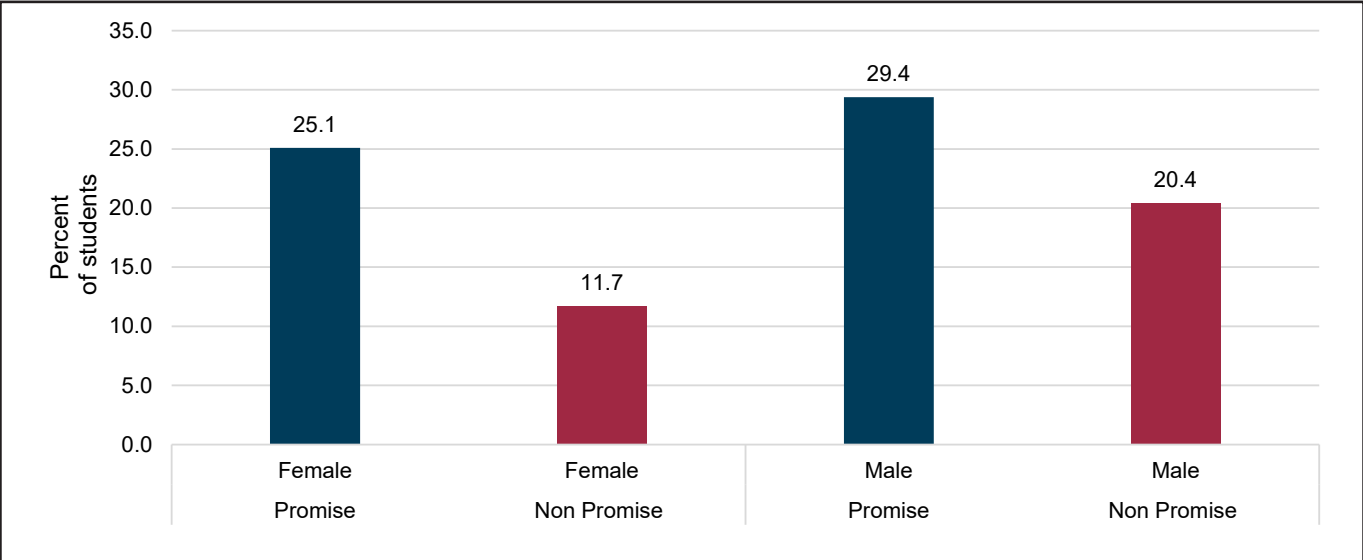
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Both female and male Promise students received on-time awards at higher rates than non-Promise students. Female Promise students received awards in their first five terms of higher education at a rate of 25.1 percent, while female non-Promise students receive an award in the same time frame at an 11.7 percent rate. Male Promise students received a degree at a 29.4 percent rate, while non-Promise students receive a degree at a 20.4 percent rate.

First-generation students

First-generation students who are Promise-eligible earn a terminating degree or certificate on time at a rate of 25.8 percent, whereas first-generation students who are not eligible for Promise earn an award on time at a rate of 17.9 percent, a difference of 7.9 percentage points.

Exhibit 4.11 First-generation Promise students earn a credential at a higher rate than first-generation non-Promise students
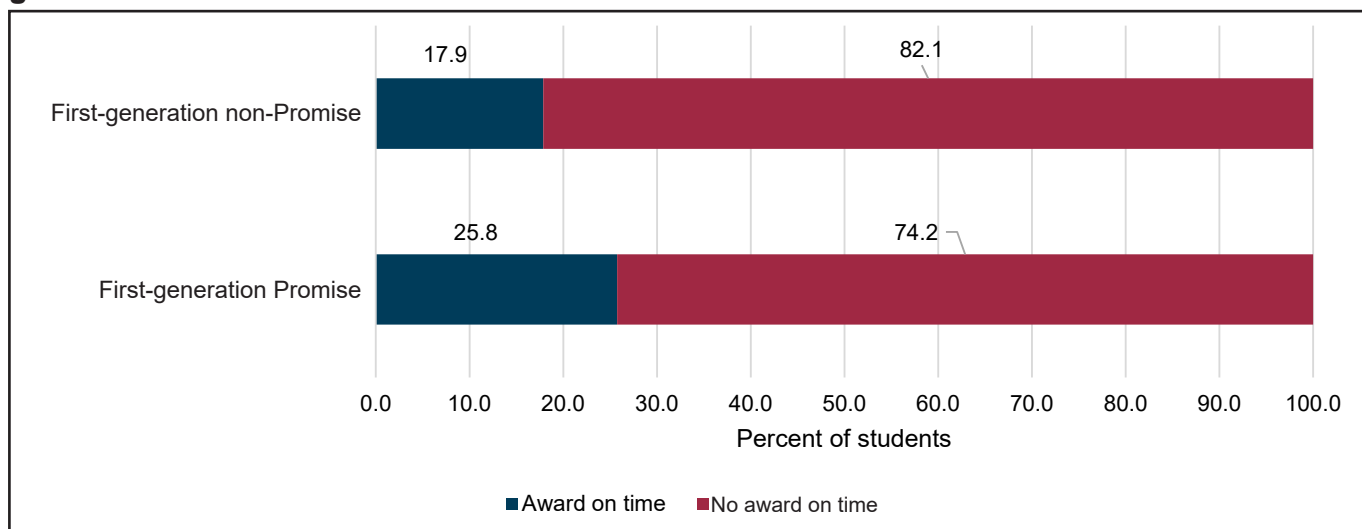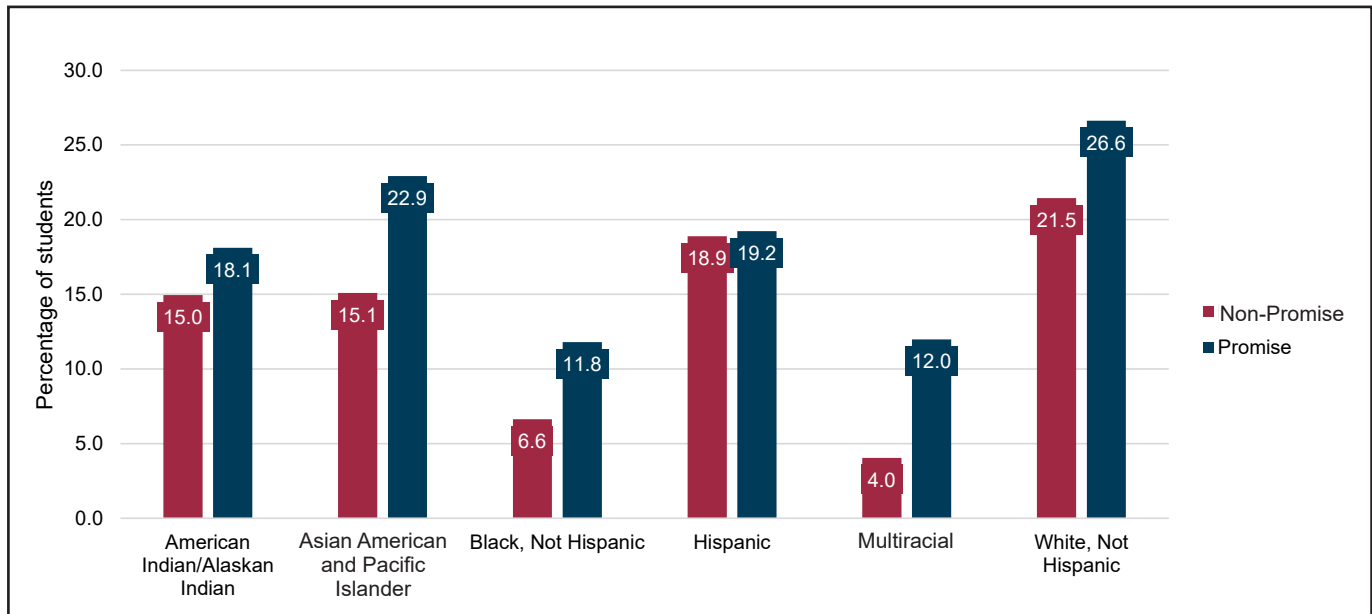

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Racial groups

Across all racial groups, Promise students received an award on time at a higher rate than non-Promise students. However, the difference between Promise and non-Promise students varies across racial groups. The largest difference between Promise and non-Promise students is with Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. Nearly 23 percent of Promise-eligible students in the AAPI group received an award on time, while 15.1 percent of non-Promise students received an award on time. The smallest difference between Promise and non-Promise students was in the Hispanic student group, of whom 19.2 percent of Promise students received an award compared to 18.9 percent of non-Promise students.

On-time award gaps between racial groups are also apparent among Promise students. White Promise students earn an award on time at a rate of 26.6 percent, while Black Promise students earn an award on time 11.8 percent of the time. Multiracial students earn an award on time at a slightly higher rate of 12 percent.

Exhibit 4.12: Percent of Promise and non-Promise students earning a credential by racial group
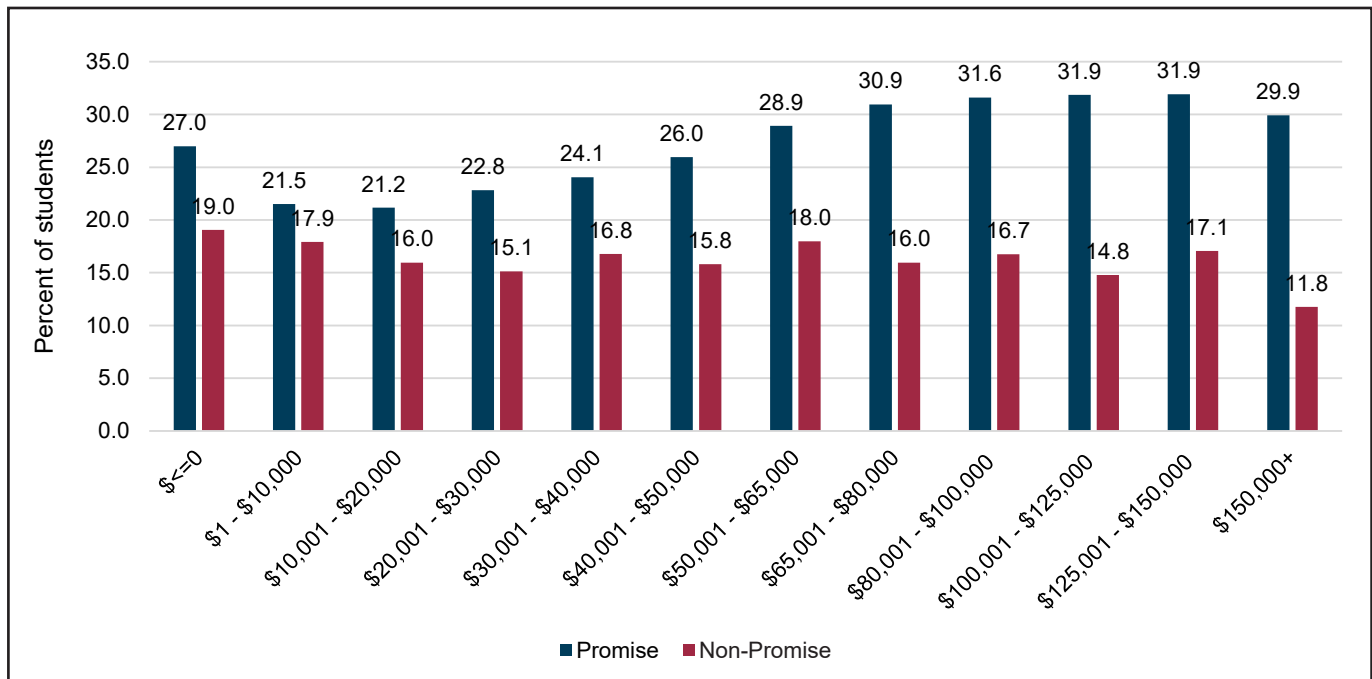

Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)

Promise students from all AGI categories earn a terminating degree or certificate during the Promise-eligible period at a higher rate than non-Promise students. However, the difference is more pronounced among students with a higher AGI. Promise students with an AGI of $0 earn an award at a rate 8 percent higher than non-Promise students with an AGI of $0. Students with an AGI of between $0-$10,000 have an even smaller difference, with Promise students earning an award on time at a 3.6 percent higher rate than non-Promise students of the same AGI group. However, Promise students with an AGI of $150,000 or higher earn an award on time at a rate 18.1 percent higher than non-Promise students with the same AGI.

Exhibit 4.13: Attainment of Promise and non-Promise students by AGI



Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Section 5: What prevents success?

Thus far in the report, OREA has identified and analyzed several measures by which to assess students' success in the Promise program. Application and enrollment, first-year retention, and credential attainment are checkpoints that indicate progress along the Promise timeline. However, as the data suggests, some students fall out of the pipeline at every step along the way. Only so many students enroll after applying, and only so many students return for their second year, and so on. For example, only 23 percent of students who applied for Promise in the fall of 2020 became Promise students in the fall of 2021.

The data shows that when students begin their college careers as members of a Promise cohort, they tend to experience greater levels of success at each checkpoint compared to their peers who start at the same schools but not as Promise students. To better understand Promise students' span of eligibility, OREA tracked enrollment from semester to semester and whether a student received a Promise payment one semester, including zero-dollar payments, and did not the next.

The following exhibits show the number of Promise students that enrolled in a postsecondary institution after losing the Promise scholarship. Exhibit 5.1 shows the number of community college students that enrolled in each semester without the Promise scholarship following semesters where they had been enrolled and received full Promise benefits. Exhibit 5.2 displays the same information for TCAT students broken down by trimesters.

Exhibit 5.1: Number of community college students who reenrolled after losing Promise eligibility, by semester
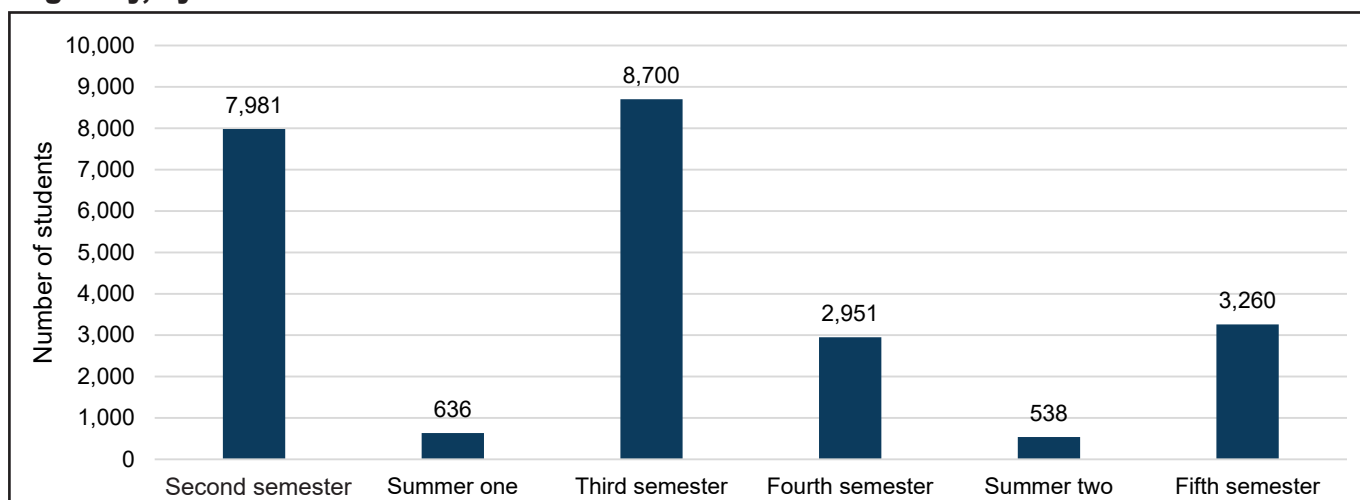
Note: For cohort 6, only data through the second summer semester was available, and only the second semester and first summer data was available for cohort 7. Students who earned their terminal award and stayed enrolled are not included.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

Exhibit 5.2: Number of TCAT students who lost Promise eligibility, by trimester
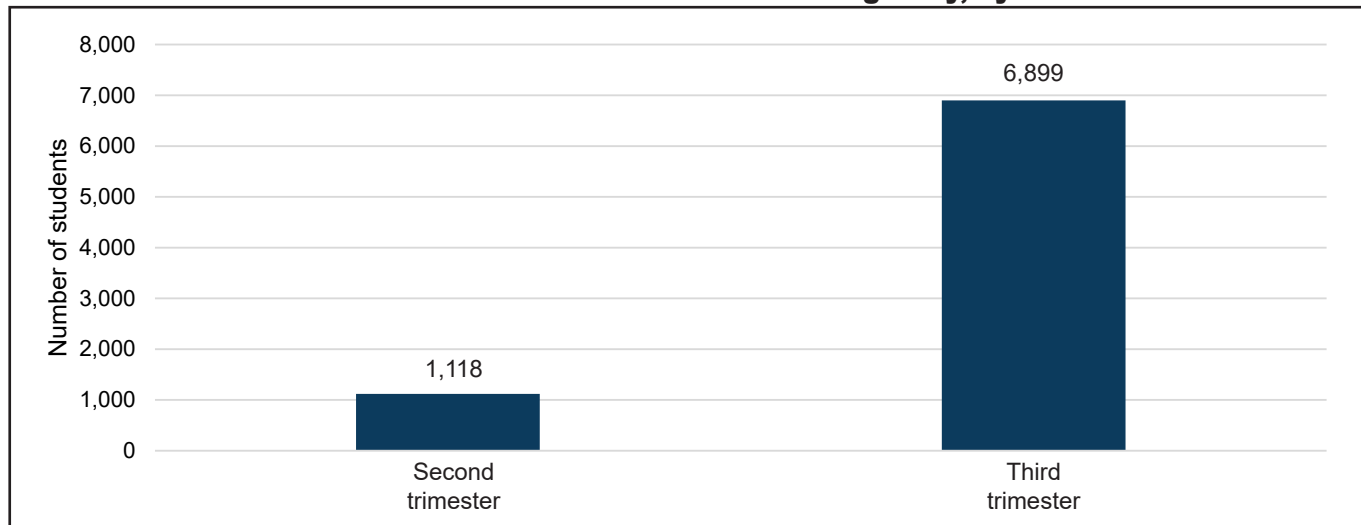
Note: For cohort 6, only data through the sixth trimester was available, and only the first three trimesters of data was available for cohort 7. Students who earned their terminal award and stayed enrolled are not included.
Source: OREA analysis of THEC data.

In total, 32,112 Promise students lost eligibility and still enrolled without having already earned their terminating award. At community colleges, more students lost Promise their second and third semesters (16,681 students) than all other semesters combined (7,385 students). At TCATs, an outsized number of students (6,899) lost Promise their third trimester.

For the students that lose Promise but continue to enroll and those that lose Promise and drop out of school, several factors may contribute to access and retention difficulties.

In terms of access, both K-12 and postsecondary stakeholders increasingly observe student groups that cannot access Promise. Survey respondents and interviewees have observed a rise in the number of homeschooled students, a group that tends to receive less engagement concerning the college-going process (Promise in particular) and students that cannot complete the FAFSA due to the lack of a social security number. Both are populations that could contribute to the state's attainment goals.

Exhibit 5.3: To what extent do students and their parents understand that Promise covers only tuition and mandatory fees?
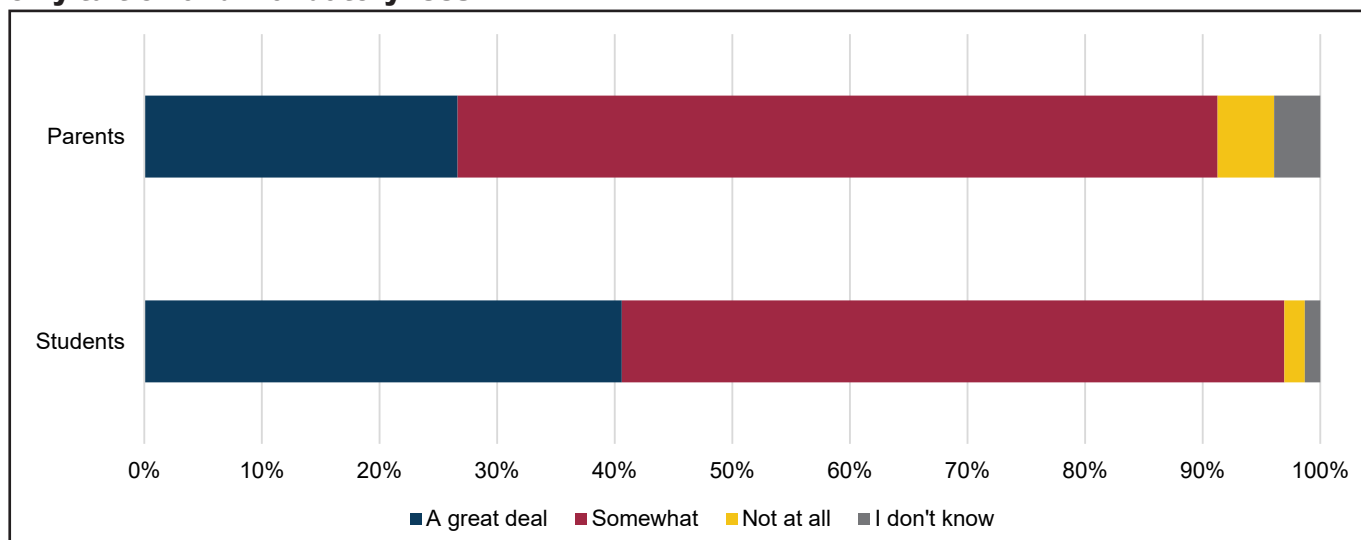
Source: OREA survey data.

As Exhibit 5.3 suggests, students and families for whom Promise is a viable option may have difficulty fully understanding and internalizing the program's scope. Over half of K-12 respondents (56.3 percent) indicated that students *somewhat* understand that Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees only. When asked the same question about whether parents understand what Promise covers, 64.6 percent of K-12 respondents indicated that parents *somewhat* understand. The limited understanding occurs despite districts generally starting to inform students about Promise by their first year of high school.

The lack of awareness continues into students' college years. Thirty-eight percent of community college and TCAT respondents indicated that students are *not very* aware of out-of-pocket expenses and 41 percent indicated that students are *somewhat* aware.

Interviewees in both K-12 and postsecondary environments attributed the limited understanding in part to a decline in marketing and advertising for Promise. Interviewees also noted that students tend to think of books, digital course materials, and tools as mandatory fees, thus they are surprised when they see charges for them.

Though high schools aim to have all their seniors fill out the Promise application, some students still do not apply. When asked why students do not apply for Promise, the most frequent responses from K-12 stakeholders were that students planned to immediately enter the workforce, planned to attend a four-year university, planned to enlist in the armed services, or had general uncertainty about their futures.

If a student does apply for Promise, they must have attended their mandatory mentor meeting, filled out the FAFSA, and completed their community service hours by the time they enroll. When discussing the FAFSA requirement, most K-12 respondents indicated that students are aware of the requirement. Despite awareness and statewide efforts to increase FAFSA filing rates, data suggests that roughly 14 percent of Promise applicants do not fill out the FAFSA. When asked what contributes to this phenomenon, as Exhibit 5.4 demonstrates, 51.1 percent of K-12 stakeholders indicated that a lack of parental involvement *very much* contributes to a student not completing the FAFSA, and 43.2 percent indicated that it *somewhat* contributes. Nearly half of respondents (49.6 percent) stated that parents are *somewhat* unwilling to give financial information and 36.8 percent of respondents said parents were *very much* unwilling to give financial information, which contributes to a student not completing the FAFSA.

Exhibit 5.4: Lack of parental support is the biggest obstacle to FAFSA completion, according to K-12 stakeholders
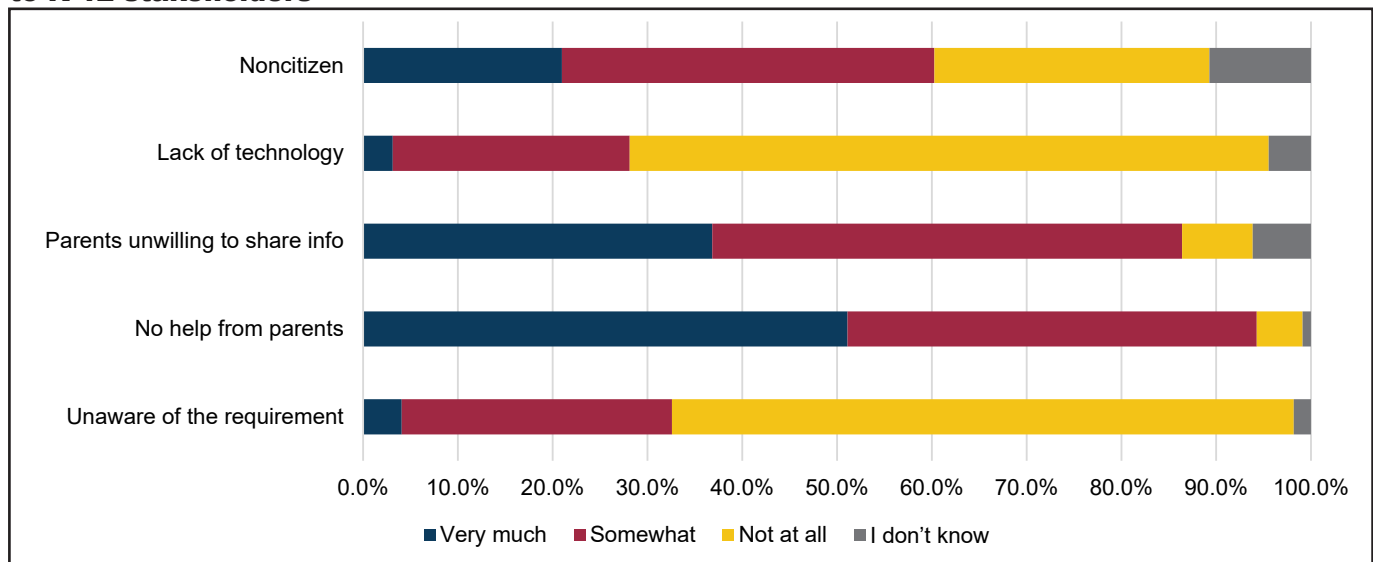
Source: OREA survey data.

OREA asked K-12 stakeholders what reasons contributed to some students failing to complete their community service requirement. As shown in Exhibit 5.5 below, the most common responses were that students were aware of the requirement but missed the deadline and that students did not have transportation to get to and from community service opportunities.

Exhibit 5.5: Reasons for not completing community service, according to K-12 respondents
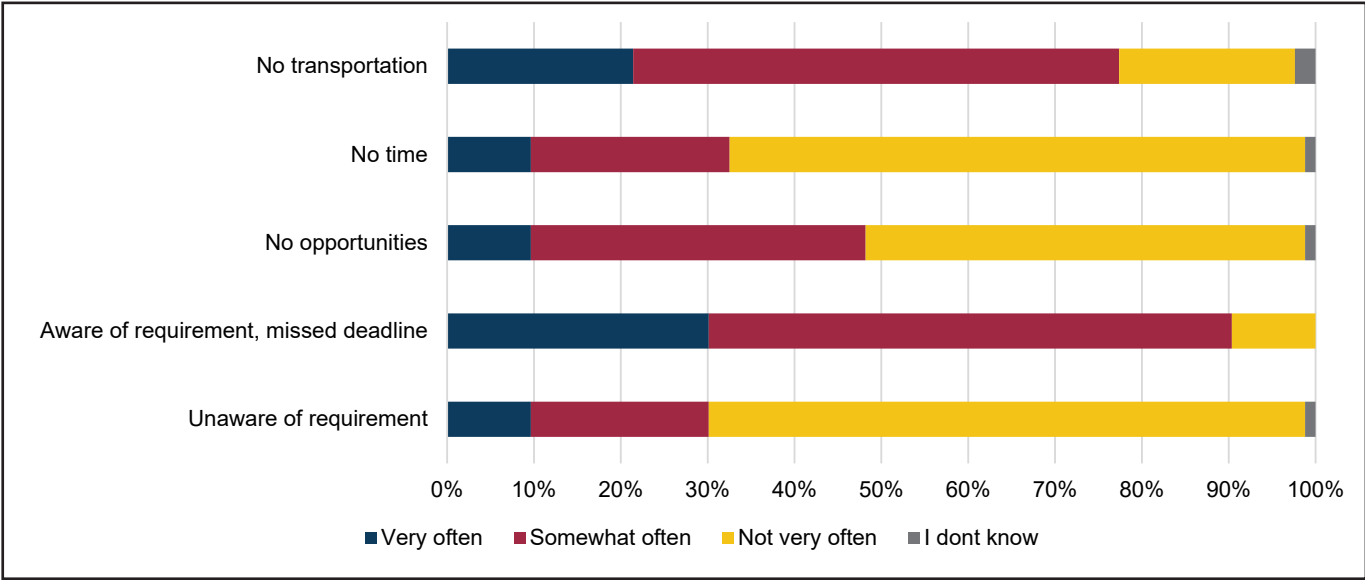
Source: OREA survey data.

OREA also asked community college and TCAT faculty and staff about the community service requirement. Of those that indicated that students *very often* or *somewhat often* fail to meet the community service requirement, 33.3 percent indicated that being unaware that hours must be submitted every semester contributes *a great deal* to missing the requirement, and 38.5 percent indicated the same contributes *somewhat*. In general, community college and TCAT faculty and staff observe that students are not completely aware that community service hours must be submitted every semester. Postsecondary employees do suggest that there are opportunities to complete community service, with 48.7 percent of respondents saying a lack of opportunities contributes *very little* to missing the requirement and 26.3 percent saying it contributes *somewhat*.

Since the community service requirement intends to foster a sense of ownership of the college-going process, OREA asked K-12 stakeholders whether the requirement accomplishes that goal. Roughly the same percent of respondents think it does and does not. When asked, 49 percent of K-12 survey respondents indicated that performing community service *somewhat* fosters a sense of ownership in their college-going process.

Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that performing community service *very much* fosters a sense of ownership, while nearly the same percentage of respondents (22 percent) said that it does *not at all* accomplish this goal.

> "How many times are we going to make students choose to go to college when there are barriers all along the way? We make them choose [college] more than we have to."
>
> – Community college administrator, OREA interview

Similar to survey respondents, interviewees observed that students who lose eligibility due to the non-academic requirements (i.e., filing the FAFSA and performing community service) may not understand that the requirements recur. Additionally, postsecondary interviewees especially expressed dismay that the requirements for Tennessee's financial aid programs differ.

Exhibit 5.6: Being academically underprepared contributes to students missing classwork related requirements
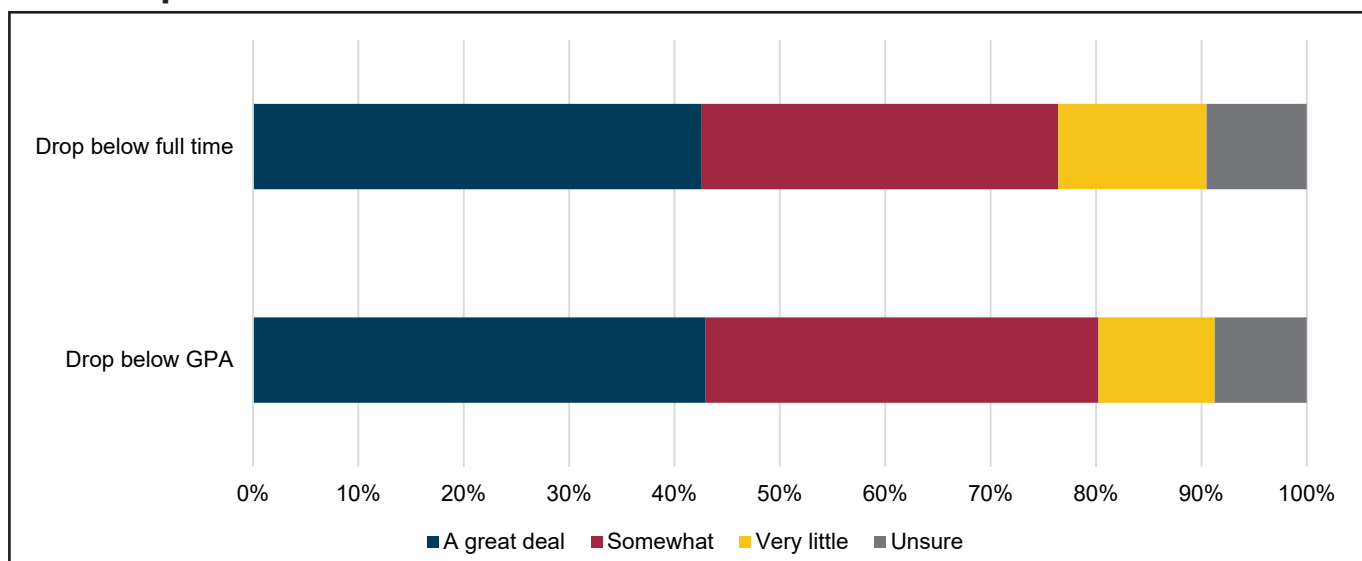
Source: OREA survey data.

Survey respondents also observed that academic preparedness has an impact on students' ability to stay above the GPA threshold and maintain full-time enrollment. When discussing the GPA requirement, 43 percent of respondents indicated being unprepared for the level of academic rigor in a college environment contributed *a great deal* to missing the requirement, and 37.3 percent said under-preparedness contributed *somewhat*. Nearly 43 and 34 percent indicated under-preparedness contributed *greatly* and *somewhat*, respectively, to students dropping below full-time status. The same trends regarding work responsibilities and academic preparedness apply for students' abilities to meet classwork-related requirements.

Exhibit 5.7: Work responsibilities contribute to students missing classwork related requirements
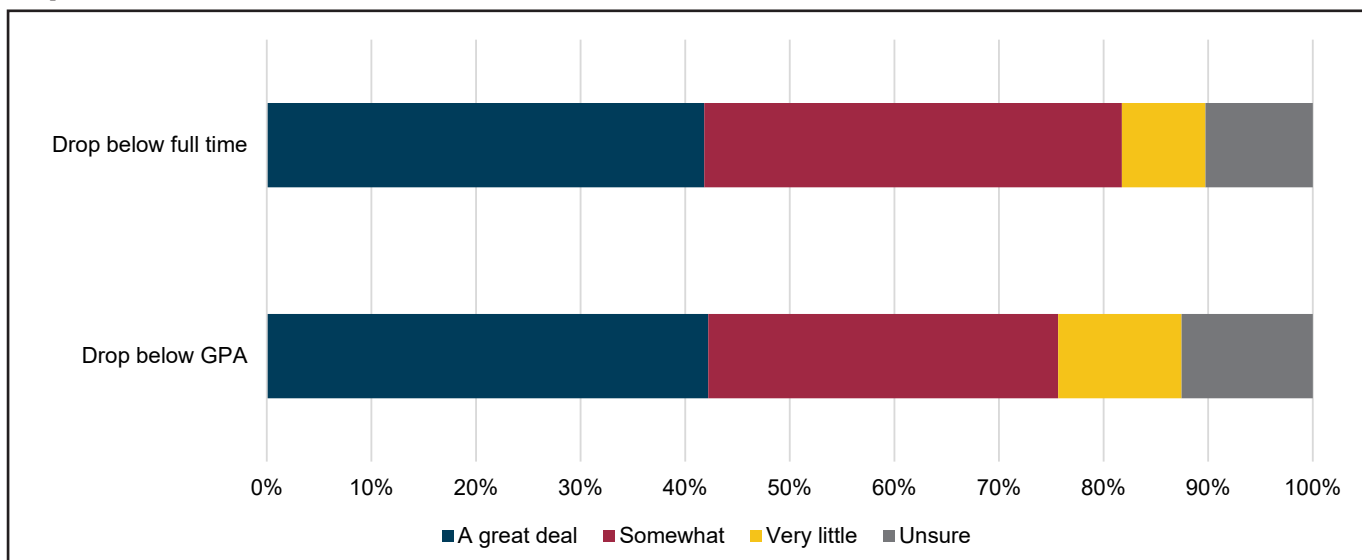
Source: OREA survey data.

In interviews, postsecondary employees noted that students have difficulty balancing school life with their personal and work lives. Competing pressures could have an adverse effect on student outcomes. Over 42 percent of survey respondents indicated that having inadequate time to devote to school due to work responsibilities *greatly* contributes to students falling below the 2.0 GPA threshold, and 33.5 percent said the same responsibilities contribute *somewhat*. Community college and TCAT employees responded similarly

when prompted about the full-time enrollment requirement, with 41.8 percent saying work responsibilities *greatly* contribute to a student dropping below full-time and 39.9 percent saying work *somewhat* contributes. Personnel at higher education institutions conveyed to OREA that they compete for students' time with rising wages in the labor market, especially at fast food restaurants.

Exhibit 5.8: Family responsibilities contribute to students missing classwork related requirements
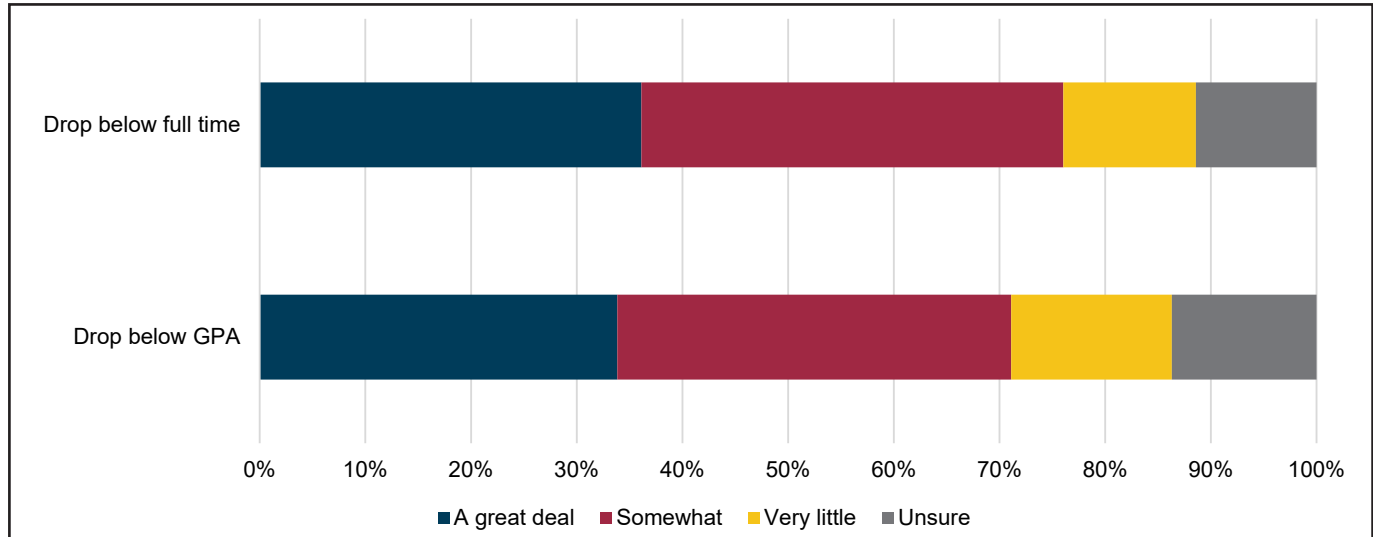
Source: OREA survey data.

Community college interviewees suggest that it has become more difficult to distinguish between Promise and Reconnect[X] students based on the type of work and family priorities all students have. The survey response data in Exhibits 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8 support the notion that community college students may be similar to non-traditional students.

Keeping academic preparedness in mind, community college faculty and staff, as well as partnering organization employees, wonder if students are best positioned to succeed with a full-time workload. In fact, some community colleges expect their students to drop classes due to time constraints and difficulty with coursework, so they encourage them to enroll in 15 credits instead of the full-time minimum of 12 to provide a cushion that prevents them from becoming part-time students if they drop a class.

Exhibit 5.9: Majority of survey respondents observe that costs of books, tools and supplies, and eCampus fees impede success
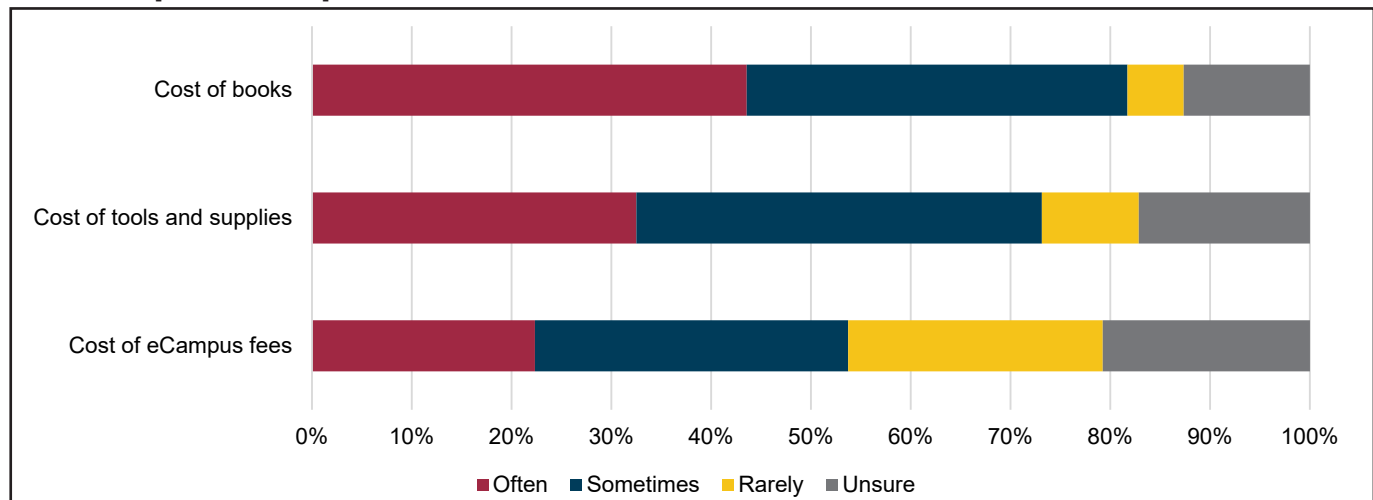
Source: OREA survey data.

[X] Tennessee Reconnect is Tennessee's similar tuition-free two-year college program for adult learners.

According to interviewees, some students think they can get by without books, and by the time they realize they need books to succeed in class, they are too far behind to catch up. Over 56 percent of survey respondents indicated that students *often* go to class without books because they were unaware of the expense, and 30 percent of respondents said students *sometimes* go to class without books because of the same lack of awareness.

Transportation continues to impede student success, too, with 32 percent and 45 percent of respondents indicating that transportation often and sometimes serves as an impediment, respectively.

Completion grants were established to help mitigate many of these cost barriers (see page 14 for more detail). However, at the time of OREA's research, completion grants were still new and awareness of them had yet to permeate the higher education landscape. Just over half (50.5 percent) of respondents from community colleges and TCATs indicated that they were unaware of completion grants at the time the survey was conducted. Those that were aware of the grants, though, overwhelmingly deemed them helpful (74.3 percent of respondents). The slow uptake of completion grant knowledge resembles much of what OREA heard during interviews with stakeholders.

Conclusions

Through analysis of data from THEC, interviews with key stakeholders involved in the Tennessee Promise scholarship program, and surveys of those familiar with the scholarship at the K-12 and postsecondary levels, OREA came to several key conclusions about Promise.

Promise students earn more credits, are retained, and earn awards at higher rates than students who enroll at the same schools but are not Promise-eligible.

At community colleges and TCATs, Promise students earn more credits than non-Promise students. On average, around 46 percent of Promise students earn a minimum of 24 credits their first year at a community college compared with approximately 18 percent of non-Promise students. At TCATs, nearly 48 percent of Promise students earn a minimum of 1,170 clock hours (which is the equivalent of three full-time trimesters with allowed absences) compared with around 26 percent of non-Promise students.

Promise students were also retained at a higher rate than non-Promise students. The higher rate for Promise students held after controlling for race, gender, first-generation-to-attend-college status, and adjusted gross income (AGI). For example, Pell-eligible Promise students were retained at a higher rate than Pell-eligible students who did not participate in Promise.

Promise students earn awards at a higher rate than non-Promise students. At community colleges, the proportion of Promise students who earn an award within the Promise-eligible time frame of five semesters is 14.5 percentage points higher than for non-Promise students. At TCATs, the proportion is 14.4 percentage points higher. Similar to retention, Pell-eligible Promise students earned an award at a higher rate than Pell-eligible students who did not participate in Promise.

A Promise student at a community college may pay at least $1,000 per year in out-of-pocket expenses. At TCATs, a Promise student's out-of-pocket expenses per year may reach $3,100.

Tennessee Promise pays for tuition and mandatory fees after all other gift aid is applied, but it does not cover other costs such as textbooks, supplies, tools, lab fees, and program-specific fees. Students are financially responsible for such costs.

Through interviews, surveys, and institution websites, OREA determined that a community college student may pay at least $1,000 in out-of-pocket expenses per year for books, fees, and supplies not covered by their Tennessee Promise scholarship. Students at TCATs may pay up to $3,100 per year for similar items.

In 2021, the General Assembly funded a $1 million pilot program to provide completion grants for Pell-eligible Promise students who have an "immediate financial need . . . that may prevent the student from completing a postsecondary degree or credential." The grants have helped students pay for books, supplies, and course-specific fees which are not covered by Promise. (Completion grants may also be used for food, housing, and transportation-related costs.) Pell-eligible Promise students can apply for a grant through their partnering organization (tnAchieves or the Ayers Foundation Trust) and request up to $1,000 per semester or $625 per trimester.

During the first year of the pilot, the Ayers Foundation Trust awarded over 150 grants and tnAchieves awarded over 1,100, depleting available funds within 10 weeks. In 2022, the General Assembly funded a completion grant expansion of $14.5 million to tnAchieves for grants and to expand the organization's

coaching initiative. By December 2022, tnAchieves had administered $1.48 million of the $1.6 million budgeted for the 2022-23 school year in completion grants to 2,855 students. The organization allocated $1.3 million of the expansion money to coaching for the 2022-23 school year.

Affording postsecondary education may remain a challenge for some Promise students. As noted above, out-of-pocket expenses for community college students may be at least $1,000 per year or up to $3,100 per year for TCAT students. Pell-eligible students may request up to $1,000 per semester or $625 per trimester in completion grant funding,[Y] but if the maximum completion grant amount is used for tools or supplies, no funding remains to help pay for food, housing, and transportation-related costs that can also be barriers to staying in school and earning an award.

Promise students just above the Pell eligibility threshold are not eligible for completion grants but may have similar financial needs that can prevent them from continuing their education and completing their academic program.

While the Promise program is effective overall, enrollment, retention, and attainment gaps exist among students.

Black students who attend Promise-eligible institutions are less likely to enroll as Promise students than their White peers. Of all students who apply for Promise and attend a Promise-eligible institution, but are not eligible for the Promise program, 56.5 percent are White and 32 percent are Black. Of all those who apply for Promise and enroll in an eligible institution as a Promise student, however, 75.9 percent are White, and 14.4 percent are Black.

Promise participants have better outcomes than their non-Promise peers, therefore closing this gap by increasing Black students' participation in Promise would help more students earn credits, stay in school, and earn a degree or credential.

Among other racial groups (Asian American and Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, multiracial, and Hispanic), the percentage who enroll as Promise students and those who enroll without Promise is similar.

There are racial disparities in retention and attainment among Promise students as well. Promise students who are Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) are retained without an award throughout their first year of postsecondary education at the highest rate of any racial group, at 70.2 percent. Promise students who are Hispanic had the second highest retention rate among racial groups, at 61.4 percent. White Promise students were retained at just under 60 percent (59.8). American Indian and Alaskan Native, Black, and multiracial Promise students are retained at less than 55 percent.

Attainment data shows a similar gap. White students had the highest attainment rate, at 26.6 percent, of any racial group. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students have an attainment rate of 22.9 percent. The attainment rate for Hispanic students was 19.2 percent. For Black and multiracial students, the attainment rate was around 12 percent.

Narrowing the racial gaps between application and enrollment, as well as throughout retention and credential attainment, would increase Tennessee's overall attainment rate and produce a more competitive workforce.

[Y] See page 14 for more information about completion grants.

Female Promise students earn on-time awards at lower rates than male students, despite higher rates of fall-to-fall retention.

Female Promise students are retained without an award, across all cohorts, at a rate of 62.1 percent. Male Promise students are retained without an award at a 55.8 percent rate, a difference of approximately 6.3 percentage points. However, female students earn an award on time at a rate lower than male students by 4.3 percentage points.

Most Promise students at community colleges do not complete a terminating degree within the program's five-semester limit. This is especially the case for nursing students.

Approximately 78.5 percent of Promise students at community colleges did not earn a terminating degree within the five Promise-funded semesters, which equates to 64,408 students without an award and 17,685 students with an award. Some of these students go on to earn a degree after expiration of Promise eligibility. In the first four Promise cohorts, 3,467 students (6.3 percent of those cohorts) earned a terminating award one semester after their program eligibility expired. Another 3,857 students (7.1 percent of those cohorts) earned a terminating award two to four semesters after.

In interviews, community college officials indicated nursing students in particular have difficulty completing a degree within the Promise program's five-semester limit. Over 9 percent of late awards (673 degrees) in cohorts 1 through 4 were nursing related. In cohorts 1 through 6, nursing degrees made up 1 percent of terminating awards earned on time (183 degrees).

Approximately a quarter of high school students who apply for Promise successfully enroll at an eligible institution as a Promise student. For various reasons, the other three-quarters of high school students who apply do not become Promise students.

Many students who apply for Promise do not intend to use the scholarship or enroll in a Promise-eligible institution. For example, students may attend high schools that strongly encourage them to complete the Promise application. Although they complete the application, these students may plan to attend an ineligible institution, join the workforce directly out of high school, or enlist in the military.

Other students, however, apply for Promise and go on to enroll in an eligible institution but never become Promise students for failure to meet a program requirement. For cohorts 1 through 7, there were nearly 23,000 such students. Students who do not participate in Promise are less likely to stay in school and earn an award.

Additionally, OREA learned of an emerging trend of homeschool students not applying for Promise and students without social security numbers applying but being unable to qualify for eligibility.

The most common reason applicants are not eligible for Promise is a failure to meet the initial community service deadline.

Approximately 50 percent of students did not become Promise students because they missed the community service requirement.[z] Students may overlook the requirement or assume Promise, like other scholarships, does not include a community service requirement. K-12 and postsecondary interviewees pointed out that no other public scholarship in Tennessee includes a community service requirement.

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[z] This number excludes the fall 2020 cohort (cohort 6) since the requirement was waived due to COVID-19. Up to four hours of community service can be completed via virtual webinars.

Students who do not overlook the requirement may still fail to meet it. A lack of transportation *very often* or *somewhat often* contributed to students not meeting the community service requirement and losing their Promise eligibility, according to roughly 77 percent of K-12 survey respondents.

Students who lose Promise and go on to attend a Promise-eligible institution are less likely than Promise students to stay in school, earn an award, and increase the state's attainment rate.

Work and family responsibilities contribute to students losing Promise.

In interviews, postsecondary employees indicated that students struggle to balance school with work and family responsibilities. To remain eligible for Promise, students must maintain full-time enrollment and a minimum 2.0 GPA. Approximately 75 percent of postsecondary survey respondents indicated work-related pressures contribute to students falling below the 2.0 GPA requirement, and nearly 82 percent indicated the same for students dropping below full time.

Family responsibilities were also cited, as 71 percent of respondents indicated that family-related pressures contribute to students falling below the GPA requirement. Seventy-six percent indicated the same for students dropping below full time.

There is limited awareness of completion grants among postsecondary officials and students.

The General Assembly funded the completion grant pilot program in 2021 to provide additional financial aid for eligible Promise students who have an "immediate financial need . . . that may prevent the student from completing a postsecondary degree or credential." Completion grants are administered by the Tennessee Promise partner organizations, tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation Trust. Pell-eligible Promise students may request a completion grant to help pay for food, housing, transportation, books/supplies, and class-specific fees. Eligible Promise students can apply for up to $1,000 per semester (or $625 per trimester) through their partner organization's website.

Slightly over half of community college and TCAT officials indicated on OREA's survey, administered in October 2022, that they were not aware of completion grants. Of those who were aware of the grants, however, three-quarters indicated that the grants help students cover additional costs.

Reviews of partnering organizations are generally positive, with some concerns about mentorship quality.

In OREA's surveys of K-12 and postsecondary stakeholders, respondents were asked to rate their designated partnering organization's (i.e., the Ayers Foundation Trust or tnAchieves) assistance in a number of categories. Respondents rated the two organizations on how well they help students transition to college, maintain Promise eligibility, access academic resources, access community service opportunities, and address non-course related barriers to success, among other things.

Among K-12 respondents, on a scale of *excellent*, *fair*, *poor*, and *unsure*, the Ayers Foundation Trust received exclusively *excellent* and *fair* ratings (excellent being the highest possible rating); tnAchieves received ratings of *excellent* or *fair* from the majority of respondents.

At the postsecondary level, on a scale of *good*, *fair*, *poor*, and *unsure*, the majority of those that work with the Ayers Foundation Trust and tnAchieves rated both organizations as *good* or *fair*, (*good* being the highest possible rating). The proportion of *fair* ratings for tnAchieves was significantly greater than that for the Ayers Foundation Trust: tnAchieves received an average of 36.7 percent *good* ratings and 20.7 percent *fair* ratings, and the Ayers Foundation Trust received an average of 55.1 percent *good* ratings and 9.2 percent *fair* ratings.

Knowledge of the Promise program varies among tnAchieves mentors and, as a result, so does the quality of mentorship provided, according to both K-12 and postsecondary interviewees.

Policy Options

The following policy options are drawn from this evaluation's key conclusions. Increased access to Promise, retention of Promise students, and higher credential attainment through the Promise program are all addressed. Some options would involve additional disbursements of Promise dollars and extending eligibility for the program. There may be tradeoffs between such options and the goal for Tennessee Promise to become financially self-sustaining.

To make the application process more efficient, the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation and the Tennessee Board of Regents should explore ways to combine the Promise and college applications.

Currently, a high school student applies separately for the Tennessee Promise scholarship and for admission into a postsecondary institution. High school administrators as well as community college personnel indicate there is confusion among Promise applicants about which application is for what purpose.

By making the Promise application part of an application to Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) institutions, this could simplify the college-going process and allow TBR institutions, which educate about 91 percent of Promise students, more flexibility to manage their student populations.

Combining the Promise application with an application to a TBR institution would mean a change to the initial Promise application deadline and would also prompt a reconsideration of timelines for other program requirements. The initial Promise application deadline (November 1 of a student's senior year of high school) would change because the deadline for applying to Promise would mirror TBR's open-access admission policy. The timeline for meeting other Promise requirements, such as community service, would need to be considered and likely adjusted.

Students who intend to use Promise at a locally governed or private institution would continue to submit a separate Promise application via the existing TSAC portal.

To improve affordability, the General Assembly could expand the reach of Tennessee Promise dollars or guarantee a minimum Promise payment.

Promise does not cover non-mandatory fees, such as fees for science labs, program-specific fees, and books. Through interviews, surveys, and institution websites, OREA determined that a Promise student attending community college may pay at least $1,000 in out-of-pocket expenses per year for books, fees, and supplies not covered by the scholarship. Students at TCATs may pay up to $3,100 per year for these items. TCAT administrators noted that tools, which are not covered by Promise, can be particularly expensive. Promise also does not cover TN eCampus course fees, which are higher than fees charged for traditional in-person courses. Depending on the number of credit hours a student takes, eCampus fees may amount to over $1,000 per semester.

Some students may be surprised when learning what Promise does not cover. In some cases, Promise students forgo course-related items such as books. When asked about the impact of unexpected costs, over 56 percent of survey respondents indicated that students often go to class without books because they were unaware of the expense, and 30 percent of respondents said students sometimes go to class without books because of the same lack of awareness.

In 2021, the General Assembly funded a $1 million pilot program to provide completion grants for eligible Promise students who have an "immediate need . . . that may prevent the student from completing a postsecondary degree or credential." Pell-eligible Promise students can apply for a grant through their partnering organization and request up to $1,000 per semester or $625 per trimester to help pay for food, housing, transportation, books or supplies, and class-specific fees. In 2022, the General Assembly funded a completion grant expansion of $14.5 million.

The General Assembly could consider expanding the reach of Promise dollars to cover some or all course-related fees and costs. If all course-related fees and costs were covered by a Promise expansion, Pell-eligible Promise students could then direct other funding they receive to non-course-related barriers (i.e., food, housing, and transportation) to staying in school and completing a degree or credential.

The General Assembly could also consider a guaranteed minimum Promise payment per semester or trimester for all Promise students. This would act as a supplement to last-dollar coverage.

In considering such options, the General Assembly may wish to consult with THEC/TSAC for cost estimates.

To increase community college credential attainment, the General Assembly could extend Tennessee Promise eligibility for some or all community college students.

Approximately 78.5 percent of community college students do not earn a terminating award within the five-semester period that they are eligible for Promise. Extending Promise eligibility by one or more semesters for some or all of these students would allow more community college students to complete a postsecondary credential with support from Promise.

An extension of Promise eligibility could be limited to students enrolled in certain programs, such as nursing. More nursing degrees are conferred to Promise students after the five-semester limit than within it. Extending Promise eligibility for nursing and/or other in-demand programs that take longer to complete would provide continued access to Promise supports and financial assistance as students near degree completion.

In considering this option, the General Assembly may wish to consult with THEC/TSAC for cost estimates.

To increase the number of applicants who become Promise students, the General Assembly could eliminate the initial community service requirement.

A failure to complete the initial community service requirement is the reason just over 50 percent of applicants lose Promise eligibility before enrollment. Up to four of the eight required community service hours can be completed virtually. Eliminating the initial community service requirement so that more students begin their postsecondary education as a Promise student could increase retention and completion rates. Those who enroll in higher education as a Promise student have higher retention and completion rates than their non-Promise peers.

To improve retention and completion for Promise students, the General Assembly could adjust the continuous, full-time enrollment requirement.

The requirement could be adjusted to allow students to regain Promise after enrolling part-time for one fall or spring semester. During their one allowable part-time semester, students would not receive Promise funding but would not lose Promise eligibility. For all fall and spring semesters afterward, students would have to enroll full-time to qualify for Promise and receive funding.

As of November 2023, Promise students may enroll part time in the summer and receive scholarship funding. Previously, students were required to enroll full time in the summer to receive scholarship funding. Allowing students to access Promise dollars while enrolled part time in the summer will help students better balance work, family, school, and the cost of education. Some students may choose to take classes in the summer and accelerate their progress toward earning a degree or credential.

Tennessee Promise partnering organizations should consider providing more training to volunteer Promise mentors.

Knowledge of the Promise program varies among tnAchieves mentors and, as a result, so does the quality of mentorship provided, according to both K-12 and postsecondary interviewees.

Partnering organizations should consider increasing training for volunteer Promise mentors to improve the quality of the mentorship provided to Promise students.

Appendix A: Postsecondary survey instrument[AA]

1. Do you work at a community college or a TCAT?

2. What institution do you represent?

3. What year did you begin working at your current institution?

4. What department do you work in?

5. What is your job title?

6. What is your institutional email address? (Your survey responses are confidential; we may follow up with you for clarification.)[AB]

7. Are you involved with your institution's Tennessee Promise recruitment efforts?

8. Are you aware of your institution's Tennessee Promise recruitment efforts?*

9. To what extent does your institution recruit Promise students in the following locations:
   (a great deal, somewhat, not at all, unsure)
   - Businesses
   - Mandatory mentor meetings for Promise
   - High schools (not including dual enrollment)
   - Dual enrollment courses
   - Churches
   - Promise info sessions (on campus or virtually)
   - Other locations (please specify)

10. To what extent does your institution recruit Promise students through the following methods:
    (a great deal, somewhat, not at all, unsure)
    - Targeted mailers
    - Targeted social media ads
    - Social media posts
    - Email
    - Billboards
    - TV ads
    - Radio ads
    - Other methods (please specify)

11. Thinking about high school seniors from various social, economic, geographic, and demographic backgrounds, what student groups, if any, are less likely to access the Promise program? Why?*

12. How often do you communicate with your area high school counselors about Tennessee Promise?*
    a. Not very often
    b. Somewhat often
    c. Very often
    d. Not applicable

[AA] OREA used skip logic on surveys in this evaluation. Skip logic allows survey respondents to bypass certain survey questions. Questions that used or were affected by skip logic are denoted with an asterisk.
[AB] Individual survey responses are confidential per *TCA* 10-7-504(a)(22)(d).

13. Based on your observation, how effective are your area high school counselors in communicating with students about Tennessee Promise requirements (i.e., application requirements, eligibility requirements, and program deadlines)?*
    a. Very effective
    b. Somewhat effective
    c. Not very effective
    d. Unsure

14. Based on your observation, to what extent has there been turnover in your area high school counselors in the last two years?*
    a. A lot of turnover
    b. Some turnover
    c. Not very much turnover
    d. Unsure

15. You indicated that you have observed "a lot of turnover" or "some turnover" in your area high school counselors. Based on your observation, how has that impacted your area high school counselors' effectiveness in communicating with students about Promise requirements?

16. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share about high school guidance counselors?

17. Has your institution adjusted any practices in response to Promise (e.g., additional class offerings, providing additional supports, engaging with students differently, etc.)? If so, please describe them below.

18. Do Promise students ask you about their eligibility status and/or do you work in a capacity to determine their program eligibility?

19. Community college version: Based on your experiences with Tennessee Promise students, please indicate how frequently students lose their Promise eligibility due to the following reasons:*
    (not very often, somewhat often, very often, unsure)
    • Failure to meet community service requirement
    • Failure to resubmit the FAFSA each academic year
    • Failure to maintain fulltime enrollment
    • Failure to maintain continuous enrollment
    • Failure to enroll in the fall semester following high school graduation
    • Initially enrolled in a non-eligible institution (e.g., four-year college or university)
    • Did not complete program of study in five semesters
    • Other (please specify)

20. TCAT version: Based on your experiences with Tennessee Promise students, please indicate how frequently students lose their Promise eligibility due to the following reasons:*
    (not very often, somewhat often, very often, unsure)
    • Failure to meet community service requirement
    • Failure to resubmit the FAFSA each academic year
    • Failure to maintain continuous enrollment
    • Failure to enroll by the fall trimester following high school graduation
    • Failure to maintain Promise eligibility while on a waitlist
    • Initially enrolled in a non-eligible institution (e.g., four-year college or university)
    • Did not complete program of study in eight trimesters
    • Other (please specify)

21. You indicated that Promise students somewhat or very often do not complete their program of study within the five semester or eight trimester limit. Based on your experience, which of the following reasons contribute to this? (check all that apply).*
    - Scheduling conflicts (e.g., student only needed one class and it was not offered that semester/trimester, course was full)
    - Program of study required more than five semesters/eight trimesters
    - Other (please specify)

22. You indicated that Promise students somewhat or very often fail to meet the community service requirement. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to this? (a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    - Unaware of initial requirement
    - Unaware of continuing requirement
    - Aware of requirement, completed hours, but missed submission deadline
    - Lack of opportunities to complete requirement
    - Lack of time to complete requirement
    - Other (please specify)

23. Community college version: Promise students must maintain a 2.0 GPA to remain eligible. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to Promise students falling below a 2.0 GPA? (a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    a. Unaware of GPA requirement
    b. Failure to attend class
    c. Inadequate time to devote to school due to work responsibilities
    d. Inadequate time to devote to school due to family responsibilities
    e. Not prepared for level of academic rigor
    f. Enrolled in too many credit hours
    g. Difficulty in online coursework
    h. Other (please specify)

24. TCAT version: Promise students must maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP) to remain eligible. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to Promise students failing to maintain SAP? (a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    a. Unaware of SAP requirement
    b. Failure to attend class
    c. Inadequate time to devote to school due to work responsibilities
    d. Inadequate time to devote to school due to family responsibilities
    e. Not prepared for level of academic rigor
    f. Enrolled in too many credits
    g. Difficulty in online coursework
    h. Other (please specify)

25. Promise students must remain enrolled full-time to maintain eligibility. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to Promise students falling below full-time status? (a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    a. Unaware of full-time requirement
    b. Failure to attend class
    c. Not prepared for level of academic rigor
    d. Drop courses due to work responsibilities
    e. Drop courses due to family responsibilities
    f. Other (please specify)

26. Community college version: Promise students must remain continuously enrolled in each fall and spring semester to remain eligible for Promise, unless they are granted a leave of absence. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to students failing to stay continuously enrolled?
(a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    a. Unaware of requirement
    b. Owing a balance
    c. Failure to attend
    d. Unable to attend due to work responsibilities
    e. Unable to attend due to family responsibilities
    f. Other (please specify)

27. TCAT version: Promise students must remain continuously enrolled from trimester to trimester to remain eligible for Promise, unless they are granted a leave of absence. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to students failing to stay continuously enrolled?
(a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)*
    a. Unaware of requirement
    b. Owing a balance
    c. Failure to attend
    d. Unable to attend due to work responsibilities
    e. Unable to attend due to family responsibilities
    f. Other (please specify)

28. Based on your experiences with Promise students, how frequently do the following barriers impede the academic success or persistence of Tennessee Promise students enrolled in your institution?
(often, sometimes, rarely, unsure)
    • Cost of online fees, including TNeCampus fees
    • Cost of other non-mandatory fees (not including online or TNeCampus fees)
    • Cost of tools and/or supplies
    • Cost of textbooks/digital course materials
    • Difficulty accessing a reliable mode of transportation
    • Geography (i.e., distance to campus)
    • Missing class due to family obligations
    • Missing class due to work obligations
    • Lack of technology proficiency
    • Lack of reliable internet access
    • Lack of reliable technology (e.g., laptop)
    • Lack of academic preparation
    • Other barriers (please specify)

29. What is the most common question or concern you hear from Tennessee Promise students?

30. In your experience, how aware are students of out-of-pocket expenses, such as fees, books, tools, and supplies, before enrolling in their courses?
    • Very aware
    • Somewhat aware
    • Not very aware
    • Unsure

31. You indicated that Promise students are not very aware of out-of-pocket expenses before enrolling in their courses. How frequently do the following scenarios occur due to that lack of awareness? (often, sometimes, rarely, unsure)*
    a. Students are purged from courses
    b. Students drop below the full-time requirement
    c. Students change majors or course schedules
    d. Students go to class without books, tools, or supplies
    e. Students stop attending classes entirely (i.e., fail to attend)
    f. Other (please specify)

32. Community college version: In your experience, how much do students pay, per semester, for fees, books, digital course materials, tools, and other supplies not covered by Promise? (Please do not include costs like transportation, housing, food, or other living expenses.)

33. TCAT version: In your experience, how much do students pay, per trimester, for fees, books, digital course materials, tools, and other supplies not covered by Promise? (Please do not include costs like transportation, housing, food, or other living expenses.)

34. Although their job titles may vary at each institution, completion coaches work full-time to assist students in accessing the resources needed to finish their programs of study. Based on this definition, does your institution have at least one completion coach?

35. What is the job title of completion coaches at your institution?*

36. How many completion coaches does your institution have?*
    a. Numeric answer
    b. Unsure

37. How are completion coaches at your institution funded? (check one)*
    • By the institution
    • Through a grant
    • A combination of institutional and grant funding
    • Other (please specify)
    • Unsure

38. Which of the following tasks are assigned to your completion coaches? (check all that apply)*
    • Helping Promise students transition from high school into postsecondary education
    • Helping Promise students maintain their Promise eligibility once enrolled at your institution
    • Helping Promise students access academic resources (e.g., tutoring) once enrolled at your institution
    • Helping Promise students access community service opportunities
    • Helping Promise students access resources to combat outside barriers to success (e.g., food insecurity, lack of transportation, childcare) once enrolled at your institution
    • Other (please specify)

39. Which partner organizations work with students at your institution? (check which apply)
    • Ayers Foundation
    • tnAchieves

40. Based on your experiences, please rate the assistance provided by tnAchieves in the following categories:*
   (poor, fair, good, unsure)
   - Helping Promise students transition from high school into postsecondary education
   - Helping Promise students maintain their Promise eligibility once enrolled at your institution
   - Helping Promise students access academic resources (e.g., tutoring) once enrolled at your institution
   - Helping Promise students access community service opportunities
   - Helping Promise students access resources to combat outside barriers to success (e.g., food insecurity, lack of transportation, childcare) once enrolled at your institution
   - Other (please specify)

41. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share about tnAchieves?*

42. Based on your experiences, please rate the assistance provided by the Ayers Foundation in the following categories:
   (poor, fair, good, unsure)
   - Helping Promise students transition from high school into postsecondary education
   - Helping Promise students maintain their Promise eligibility once enrolled at your institution
   - Helping Promise students access academic resources (e.g., tutoring) once enrolled at your institution
   - Helping Promise students access community service opportunities
   - Helping Promise students access resources to combat outside barriers to success (e.g., food insecurity, lack of transportation, childcare) once enrolled at your institution
   - Other (please specify)

43. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share about the Ayers Foundation?*

44. Are you aware of completion grants that are available to students? (Eligible students may apply for a completion grant through their partner organization. Students may request a completion grant to cover the cost of food, housing, transportation, college-related technology, books, supplies, or special course fees.)*

45. Based on your observation, are completion grants helpful for students?
   a. Yes
   b. Somewhat
   c. No

46. You indicated that completion grants are not helpful or are somewhat helpful. What limitations do completion grants have?*

47. Based on your observations, how has COVID-19 impacted Promise students at your institution?

48. What would you change about Promise, if anything, to enroll more students into the program?

49. What would you change about Promise, if anything, to keep more Promise students in the program?

50. What would you change about Promise, if anything, so that more Promise students complete a postsecondary degree/credential?

51. In your opinion, to what extent does the Promise program accomplish the following:
    (a great deal, somewhat, very little, unsure)
    - Increasing awareness of postsecondary opportunities
    - Increasing access to postsecondary education
    - Increasing the college going rate
    - Increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree/credential
    - Other (please specify)

52. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share regarding the Tennessee Promise program? Feel free to respond candidly. Your final thoughts can be critical of the program or describe its successes.

Appendix B: K-12 survey instrument

1. Please enter your name.

2. Please select your district from the dropdown list.

3. Please select your school in the text box from the dropdown list. If not applicable, type N/A.

4. What is your job title?

5. How long have you been in your current role?

6. What is your work email address? (Your survey responses are confidential; we may follow up with you for clarification.)[AC]

7. To what extent do the following entities communicate with you directly about TN Promise?
(a great deal, somewhat, not at all, I don't know, N/A)
   a. District leadership
   b. School leadership
   c. Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC)
   d. Local postsecondary institutions
   e. tnAchieves
   f. Ayers Foundation
   g. Niswonger Foundation
   h. Advise TN
   i. Other (please specify)

8. To what extent do you seek out information about TN Promise from the following entities?
(a great deal, somewhat, not at all, I don't know)
   a. District leadership
   b. School leadership
   c. Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC)
   d. Local postsecondary institutions
   e. tnAchieves
   f. Ayers Foundation
   g. Niswonger Foundation
   h. Advise TN
   i. Other (please specify)

9. When does your school or district start informing students about TN Promise?
   a. Before high school
   b. 9th grade
   c. 10th grade
   d. 11th grade
   e. 12th grade
   f. Unsure

[AC] Individual survey responses are confidential per *TCA* 10-7-504(a)(22)(d).

10. Does your school/district dedicate a time during regular school hours for eligible students to complete the TN Promise application with supervision (e.g., during a class period or school assembly)?
(yes, no, I don't know)

11. Does your school/district engage in any other Promise-specific activities either during or outside of regular school hours, among students or faculty/staff? (e.g., Promise-specific training, FAFSA information sessions, working with community partners)

12. Based on your observation, do students at your institution understand the difference between each step of the TN Promise college-going process (i.e., the Promise application, registering for the TSAC portal, college application, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

13. Based on your observation, to what extent do students understand that TN Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees, not books or fees associated with program of study?
    - A great deal
    - Somewhat
    - Not at all
    - I don't know

14. Based on your observation, to what extent do parents understand that TN Promise covers tuition and mandatory fees, not books or fees associated with program of study?
    a. A great deal
    b. Somewhat
    c. Not at all
    d. I don't know

15. Based on your observation, which of the following reasons contribute to eligible students not completing the TN Promise application? (select all that apply)
    a. Unaware of TN Promise
    b. Intention to enter the workforce immediately after high school graduation
    c. Intention to attend an ineligible institution
    d. Intention to enlist in armed services
    e. Inability to cover all associated costs (e.g., books, course fees, etc.)
    f. Uncertainty of future plans
    g. Other (please specify)

16. Thinking about high school seniors from various social, economic, geographic, and demographic backgrounds, what student groups, if any, are less likely to take advantage of the Promise program, based on your observation? Why?

17. Based on your observation, to what extent do the following reasons contribute to students not completing the FAFSA?
(very much, somewhat, not at all, I don't know)
    a. Unaware of requirement
    b. Lack of parental involvement
    c. Parents unwilling to provide financial information
    d. Lack of adequate technology
    e. Non-citizenship status
    f. Other (please specify)

18. Based on your experiences with TN Promise applicants, please indicate how frequently students lose their Promise eligibility due to the following reasons:
    (very often, somewhat often, not very often, I don't know)
    - Failure to meet community service requirement
    - Failure to submit the FAFSA
    - Failure to enroll in the fall semester following high school graduation
    - Initially enrolled in an ineligible institution (e.g., ineligible four-year college or university)
    - Other (please specify)

19. You indicated that Promise applicants somewhat often or very often fail to meet the community service requirement. Based on your experience, to what degree do the following reasons contribute to this?
    (very often, somewhat often, not very often, I don't know)
    a. Unaware of requirement
    b. Aware of requirement and completed hours, but missed submission deadline
    c. Lack of opportunities to complete requirement
    d. Lack of time to complete requirement
    e. Lack of transportation to community service opportunities
    f. Other (please specify)

20. The TN Promise community service requirement was implemented in part to foster a student's sense of ownership and community involvement in the college-going process. Based on your observation, to what extent does the community service requirement accomplish these goals?
    (a great deal, somewhat, not at all, I don't know)

21. What is the most common question or concern you hear from students about TN Promise?

22. Which TN Promise partner organization works with Promise applicants in your school district?
    (check which option applies)
    - Ayers Foundation
    - tnAchieves
    - I don't know

23. Based on your experience, please rate the assistance provided by tnAchieves in the following categories:
    (good, fair, poor, I don't know)
    - Providing Promise applicants with information about TN Promise
    - Communicating eligibility requirements to Promise applicants
    - Communicating program deadlines to Promise applicants
    - Helping Promise applicants access community service opportunities
    - Helping Promise applicants transition from high school into postsecondary education
    - Other (please specify)

24. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share about tnAchieves?
    (open ended response)

25. Based on your experience, please rate the assistance provided by the Ayers Foundation in the following categories:
(good, fair, poor, I don't know)
   • Providing Promise applicants with information about TN Promise
   • Communicating eligibility requirements to Promise applicants
   • Communicating program deadlines to Promise applicants
   • Helping Promise applicants access community service opportunities
   • Helping Promise applicants transition from high school into postsecondary education
   • Other (please specify)

26. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share about the Ayers Foundation?

27. How well were you informed about changes to TN Promise due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
(very well, somewhat, not well, not sure, N/A)

28. What would you change about Promise, if anything, to enroll more students into the TN Promise program?

29. What would you change about Promise, if anything, to keep more Promise students in the TN Promise program?

30. What would you change about Promise, if anything, so that more Promise students complete a postsecondary degree/credential?

31. In your opinion, to what extent does the TN Promise program accomplish the following?
(a great deal, somewhat, very little, I don't know)
   • Increasing awareness of postsecondary opportunities
   • Increasing access to postsecondary education
   • Increasing the college-going rate
   • Increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree/credential
   • Training and retaining credentialed talent in Tennessee
   • Other (please specify)

32. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share regarding the TN Promise program? Feel free to respond candidly. Your final thoughts can be critical of the program or describe its successes.

Office of Research and Education Accountability Staff

Director
♦ Russell Moore

Assistant Director
♦ Lauren Spires

Principal Research Analysts
♦ Kim Potts
♦ Dana Spoonmore

Research Analysts
♦ Erin Brown
Lance Iverson
♦ David Melendez
♦ Allison Pams
♦ Robert Quittmeyer
Matthew Veach

Publication Specialist
♦ Paige Donaldson

Program Coordinator
♦ Caitlin Kaufman

♦ Indicates staff who assisted with this project

Office of Research and Education Accountability

Russell Moore | *Director*
425 Rep. John Lewis Way N.
Nashville, Tennessee 37243
615.401.7866
www.comptroller.tn.gov/OREA/